

The Nation.

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JAN 17

EDITORIAL

DEMOCRATIC VACUUM

It hasn't gone unremarked that there is a dearth of Democratic presidential candidates testing the political waters, an unprecedented condition less than two years before the 1992 election. On a recent visit to our office George McGovern, the former Senator from South Dakota, reminisced that when he ran in 1972 his campaign was well under way by the equivalent January.

McGovern also said it has never been more important for the Democrats to use the presidential arena to make a case against the current drift of national policies. If no one else will do it, he said, he might be willing to make that case himself, although he would gladly step aside for an aspirant who shares his sense of urgency and has a better chance.

McGovern is right. There's a desperate need for a Democrat of national stature who will call for a complete restructuring of the nation's priorities. For forty years, the United States has allocated billions for defense against the Soviet menace. Now, with that menace behind us (if indeed it ever existed), we're still spending \$300 billion a year—\$70 billion of that for nuclear weaponry. A war in the Persian Gulf would add cruelly to the burden, but even if it is averted, the defense drain will continue. If we're ever going to root out the country's festering problems, we must recapture that money for domestic programs.

At a time when the U.S. economy is sagging into recession, when unemployment insurance programs are stretched to the limit, when Congress should be debating countercyclical spending (e.g., public works projects), someone in the campaign glare must make the case against Reagan-Bush military Keynesianism. Whether or not that person is McGovern, we welcome his call to mount a challenge to the national security state.

SOUTH KOREA'S 'PLANTADOS'

Aryeh Neier

DEATH ON THE JOB

William Serrin

SEOUL ON ICE

Tim Shorrock

FARRAKHAN: FALSE PROPHET—II

Adolph Reed Jr.

TALES OF PSYCHIATRY

Brina Caplan

ECONOMIC INCENTIVES FOR WAR

THOMAS FERGUSON

Last November, the day after the election, President Bush abruptly raised the stakes in the Persian Gulf by sharply increasing the number of U.S. troops committed. Two days later he canceled scheduled rotations for the forces already in Saudi Arabia. Thus Desert Shield became Desert Sword.

Now a thousand points of light seem all but fated to burst macabrely in the sky east of Suez sometime soon, if not necessarily on January 16, setting in motion a vast train of scarcely imaginable upheavals. Yet the logic of Desert Shield and, especially, the President's bold "double or nothing" gamble still remains something of a puzzle. What was the rush? With the flow of evidence that the sanctions were working, why wouldn't the Administration slow down?

To understand why Desert Shield unfolded the way it has, we begin with what seems a truism, that the U.S. involvement in the region is all about oil—a claim that is just close enough to the truth to be seriously misleading. Of course oil in the Middle East is what makes the area valuable. But it is necessary to understand the specific form in which this wealth enters the world economy. More than one analyst, particularly on the right wing of the G.O.P., has realized that as a source of supply, Middle Eastern oil is far more important to Europe and Japan than it is to the United States, and has thus deemed the U.S. intervention there an act of utter folly, amounting to a vast subsidy to competitors.

That view is simple.
(Cont. on p. 76)



EXCHANGE.

FORUMS, NOT SHOW TRIALS

New York City

Nation reviewer Haywood Burns, president of the Nation Institute, has drowned Jim Sleeper's brave and eloquent book *The Closest of Strangers: Liberalism and the Politics of Race in New York* in deception ["Apology for Archie," Dec. 3, 1990]. Sleeper, we learn, is a big fan of Ed Koch. He opposes the principle of one person, one vote. He thinks the civil rights movement is responsible for today's urban problems. He even denies that institutional racism exists. Sure, and I'm Queen Cleopatra of the Egyptians.

Come on! Does anyone think that if Sleeper had written such a David Duke-type tract, *The Nation* would have bothered to assign it? Does *The Nation* debate with *The Klansman*? Burns simply puts a hood over the entire book. We never learn its subject—New York's flawed but uncommon interracial cultural and political tradition and its collapse; its argument—the need for the left to base its actions on truths that can travel across interethnic and interracial boundaries; or that a section of the book criticizes what the author believes is *The Nation's* longstanding patronization and contempt for African-Americans, going back to the 1930s.

It's almost as if we were back in the 1930s. The institutional arrangements put in place to advance blacks since the civil rights revolution cannot be criticized today any more than those designed to help workers after the Soviet revolution. Point out that a new class has benefited at the expense of the intended beneficiaries, and your criticism is automatically assimilated to the destructive attacks of racists and counterrevolutionaries.

This utterly cynical school of criticism justifies distortions and deceptions as necessary for preserving the gains of the revolution. It might concede that some honest critics are trying to strengthen the left through their criticism. But the critics' evident courage and credentials make it all the more necessary to destroy their reputations. "Objectively," the argument runs, all criticism plays into the hands of enemies and has the same destructive effect. Well, lack of criticism has its effect too. And now there is no socialism in the Soviet Union left to criticize.

The same mentality that once refused to distinguish between a Sakharov and a Solzhenitsyn now reduces *The Closest of Strangers* to an apologia for Archie Bunker. Can't we ever learn? Instead of staging literary show trials with Beria-like prosecutors such as Burns, *The Nation* should be strengthening our movement by sponsoring forums about books like *The Closest of Strangers*. How about it?

Bob Fitch

OPPORTUNITY KNOCKED

Cambridge, Mass.

The Closest of Strangers makes a complex ar-

gument about the relationship between political strategy and political culture: that effectual, enduring victories for racial justice cannot be won "behind the back" of the electorate, out of public view, in contests among legal and other professional elites; that such victories can be won only by interracial electoral majorities, united by core moral and political values; that articulating those values, which include self-reliance as well as communal provision, self-discipline as well as civil liberties, is the most important job of both black and white leaders; and that too great a reliance on a rhetoric of grievance and victimization has left unaccomplished this primary task of finding common ground. Honest discussion of this argument—which can be generalized to virtually every sphere of political struggle—is crucial if the left is ever to break out of its chronic isolation. Jim Sleeper lays out the argument with an extraordinary accumulation of evidence and nuance. Haywood Burns barely mentions it, as if unaware of, or reluctant to acknowledge, its centrality and significance. Too bad; an opportunity missed.

George Scialabba

FORECLOSED DEBATE

New York City

I'd be surprised if some *Nation* readers aren't wondering whether I'm really as benighted as Haywood Burns reports in his review of *The Closest of Strangers*. Have I spent thirteen years accumulating what he calls "a wealth of experience . . . as an organizer, public servant and journalist" on the left, only to produce a "naïve," "meanspirited" book "full of racial insults," such as using "the term 'Negro' to describe Americans of African descent"? Can it really be that Sleeper "either does not appreciate the full meaning of racism or he is so mired in it that he is incapable of separating himself from it"? Worse yet, do I really like Ed Koch?

Or might it be that our terms of racial discourse are getting a much-needed overhaul; that *The Closest of Strangers* is part of that effort; and that Burns, scrambling to defend the old orthodoxy, sees only darkness in the dawn? His review is more crudely reductionist than any others (see especially Salim Muwakkil's, in the December 12 *In These Times*; and more are coming). I'll send them all to anyone who writes to me at 225 E. 14th Street, Apt. 2B, New York, NY 10003, to show that, in trying to anathematize me, Burns has merely isolated himself.

He tries to foreclose debate with cheap shots. I use "Negro" sixteen times in 345 pages, always in historical context, e.g.: "Ever since the left and the Negro first met over battered tin coffee pots in the city's cold basements during the Depression, their destinies have been woven together more tightly than many black leaders would like. Perhaps the time has come for white leftists, too, to reas-

sess the relationship." That slavery was a "variant" of other exploitation is Carey McWilliams's thesis; I agree with McWilliams in context but write often of America's special debt to blacks. My point about white ethnics isn't that they've made "more sacrifices" than liberals; it's that they've had bad experiences that any serious politics must take into account. As for Burns's claim that I agree with whites who see more bad than good in blacks, read page 130 and learn about Burns's scholarship. On Koch, read pages 108-15, including Burns's citation, and pity Burns.

His other complaints, too, are wrenched hideously out of context, though I do think Jitu Weusi, whom I portray at length as an honorable man, is "badly confused" about nationalism and socialism; I'd be amused to hear Burns argue otherwise. Nor does Burns tell you that he himself is in my book, in an anecdote unflattering to the City University of New York Law School, of which he is dean; or that I don't just "slam" *The Nation* but critique its racial coverage across a whole chapter.

Why so shoddy and duplicitous a review? It's tempting to mimic Burns's cagey "either/or" formulations: Either he has no intelligence or he has no integrity. But mainly I think he's angry. He's made a career of trading deftly on the proposition, familiar to *Nation* readers, that blacks' unique experience in America equips them to lead social-change movements; that their grievances are loose threads that, when pulled, unravel the whole fabric of oppression and lies. When I deny that racism nourishes great insights in its victims with anything like the regularity of leftist deference to black "leaders," Burns thinks he hears an ancient enemy. Even after the rank demagoguery in the Tawana Brawley and Central Park jogger cases, he hears "racial insults" only from me (but can't say what they are).

I do excoriate some black protest leaders and their apologists of all colors because I'm convinced that a politics based on dramatizing racial grievances hasn't the ghost of a chance in America. Nor can elaborately extrapolated legal assaults on an ever more elastically defined racism ever dissolve racism. They'll do what Burns's review does: expand the definition of racism to encompass not only every truly aggrieved but misguided soul who voted for John Silber but also even me—and, in so doing, constrict and catechize the ranks of the racially correct until they become an elite—Burns's "true proponents of racial justice."

The left can do better, as I show with Harlem's "Don't Buy Where You Can't Work" campaign of the 1930s and today's Hospital Workers' Union in New York. Nobody funds such approaches, of course; they don't offer comfortable careers. What offends Burns, both a law school dean and a self-proclaimed agnostic on the question of whether Tawana Brawley was raped, is my refusal to make the

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EDITORIALS.

No News: Bad News

It's hard to believe that the Pentagon is so worried about unrestricted news media coverage of the Persian Gulf crisis that it is proposing radical rules of censorship to manage the news in time of war. The generals are clearly obsessed with the Vietnam experience, when a handful of hotshot reporters in Saigon chronicled the deepening quagmire that ultimately swallowed the U.S. mission in Southeast Asia. That was then. Now, the press is practically leading the

charge. Network TV types, in particular, endlessly celebrate the valor of the troops, glamorize the array of arms and demonize the unspeakable Saddam Hussein. The brass should be beaming.

But for some reason they don't see how good the media are for the war effort. If war comes, rather than let reporters wander through the desert, gathering sights of destruction and sounds of agony (and news of the occasional misfiring of a "sophisticated" U.S. weapon), the Pentagon would restrict coverage to pools of print and broadcast journalists, who would be escorted everywhere and allowed to see only offi-

cially sanctioned sights. (The military had planned to prohibit unmonitored, off-the-record conversations with G.I.s and the broadcasting of pictures of severely wounded soldiers, but withdrew both provisions after protests from news organizations.) And, of course, reportage that might offend the "sensibilities" of the Saudi hosts would be strictly *verboten*.

In presenting their guidelines, Defense Department flacks insist that the censorship is necessary for security reasons: A slip of the lip will sink a ship, and all that. But in fact the motives are simply, and cynically, political. The Reagan Administration established the precedent for total censorship in the Grenada invasion, having watched with envy how Prime Minister Thatcher kept the ever-servile British press under very tight restrictions and banned television crews from the Falklands during her brief and successful war to recapture that colony from Argentina. Britons got their news of the conflict from one man chatting amiably every evening to a TV camera in London.

American news agencies put up a small squawk after Grenada, but President Bush carried on with the policy in Panama, and the complaints grew fainter. Whether the great media organizations will raise a bigger fuss now remains to be seen. Already a group of smaller magazines, independent journals and individual writers has begun a legal battle against the Administration and its warmakers to stop the censorship guidelines from being implemented. *The Nation* leads the list of complainants in the suit, which is being argued by the Center for Constitutional Rights.

There has been ample opportunity for the media giants, with their platoons of reporters and camera crews in the gulf area, to get at the stories behind the official line and patriotic blather. The horrors of Saudi Arabia, for example, are at least as reportable as those of South Vietnam. Where are the stories of Saudi atrocities against the hundreds of thousands of Yemenis expelled recently in scenes reminiscent of Iraqi predations against the conquered Kuwaitis?

The fact is that the post-Reagan American media do such a good job of censoring themselves and managing the news according to Washington's political line du jour that no draconian guidelines may be needed to keep reporters in check. And if the Pentagon wants complete control of the situation, it can put through its plan (already discussed by senior officers in-country) to bomb Iraq's satellite uplink transmitters so that no news or pictures of events in enemy territory will contaminate American viewers. Thus the American military will succeed, for perhaps the first time in history, in censoring not only its own side but the enemy as well. Talk about total war.

The Rating Game

Unless the governors of the Postal Service have their collective consciousness raised in the next couple of weeks, "Aunt Minnie"—the P.O.'s name for the average household consumer—will spend an extra \$8 per year on postage. *The Nation*, when one totals the cost of weekly mailings to our 92,000 subscribers and semiannu-

al subscription solicitations to hundreds of thousands of prospective subscribers, will fork over an extra \$250,000. Neither of these increases is warranted.

Consumer advocate Ralph Nader is right when he calls the Postal Service "fat" and "inefficient," but the real policy questions go deeper. As Stanley Cohen, for many years Washington editor of *Advertising Age*, observed, "The Postal Service is the only major advertising medium where 'readers' pay more so advertisers pay less." Relatively low prices for bulk third-class mail are possible only because postal overhead costs are charged to letter mail. So much for Aunt Minnie.

The simple way to keep her rates down, without costing the Postal Service an additional cent, is to change the service's mandate: Require bulk mail to pay its fair share toward maintaining the system. Let bulk mail subsidize first class rather than the other way around.

As mini-bulk mailers, opinion journals should pay their fair share of postal costs, but the question is, what should that share be? Magazines such as *The Nation* and, yes, *The New Republic* and *National Review*, which circulate political ideas, have no high-powered lobbyists to represent their interests before the Postal Service Commission, as do the big magazines. Thus, the formula for computing our postal costs is set to our disadvantage.

Technological advances have endowed the Postal Service with the potential to become a cheap, efficient, democratic medium for communicating a wide range of ideas. Instead, the medium is becoming the advertising message.

Economic

(Continued From Front Cover)

minded. First of all, precisely because the area's oil supplies are relatively more important to the allies, the United States' unique ability to project power within the region confers enormous leverage in its negotiations with the allies over, for example, American commercial access to Western Europe or Japan. No less important, so much of the world's capacity for producing oil is found in the region, it remains true that any country that succeeds in dominating the region would probably exercise plenary power over the price of oil.

Most telling, however, oil sales to Europe and Japan generate financial surpluses. These surpluses, in turn, have to flow somewhere to be saved and then, for a price, to be re-invested. The petrodollar surpluses of the leading Middle Eastern states no longer represent the Amazon of world capitalism (that designation belongs to the Japanese trade surplus with the United States). They probably do not even qualify as its Nile (as, perhaps, do the bulging funds now amassed by Germany, GmbH). But the gulf certainly qualifies as the world economy's Mississippi, a father of financial waters that still flows majestically into New York and London (where the largest U.S. banks, most of them now in serious trouble, have branches).

Although Arab investors have shrewdly diversified their assets, the bulk of their surpluses is still recycled through American and British institutions. In addition, the Arab states

continue to price their oil in dollars—a fact that is as fundamental to the international role of the dollar as the law of gravity is to the solar system.

Why the United States rejected the much-touted option of sending in a multinational force in the wake of Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait should now be apparent. In the real world of the 1990s, those who defend the oil fort will have de facto control of an Arabian treasure beyond the dreams of Aladdin. And pressed ever more sharply by a resurgent Europe and Japan, the United States and Britain (the one large country to support the Bush Administration down the line) have no intention of internationalizing the surplus.

Having decided to go in at all, it made sense for the Administration to go in massively, since sending in just a few troops would place enormous strains on the gulf states' political structures without providing either the United States or those governments with any means to counter the escalating dangers.

That brings us to the great puzzle: Why didn't the Administration try to buy time and give the sanctions a chance to work? The answer is as straightforward as it is stark: Buying time costs real money. And this the Administration knew it didn't have.

At the moment, cost estimates of Desert Shield are flying around like small birds. In no small part, this is because such estimates have become weapons in the political debate. Opponents of war can gain by estimating high; supporters of the Administration can counter by coming in low. But at least the true order of magnitude is plain. Back on November 21, the Center for Defense Information in Washington estimated that Desert Shield was costing approximately \$74 million a day (about \$27 billion a year). Not only have there been important deployments since (along with revelations that the government is paying premium prices for many services purchased on short notice), but these numbers take no account of the colossal expenditures, amounting to many billions of dollars, funneled to Third World countries whose economies have been damaged by the crisis.

Once upon a time, the U.S. economy could have borne these costs comparatively easily. But today the Bush Administration is facing record budget deficits, while enormous bills are coming due for the savings and loan disaster, the revamping of the health care system, nuclear cleanup and any number of environmental disorders. And the line of worthy claimants for new spending now stretches around the block: bankrupt cities, Eastern Europe, Central America, decaying infrastructure, education and so on. On top of all this the United States is entering a recession amid daily reports of new troubles in the financial system. (The crisis is, however, helping some of the largest banks. Some firms are reportedly well aware that a friend at SAMA, the Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency, formerly headed by Under Secretary of the Treasury David Mulford, can be a friend indeed. Such "dependency in reverse" is assuredly helping dampen earlier business doubts about U.S. policy.)

Moreover, only days before Bush's electrifying November announcement, the full weight of all these considerations bore in on his Administration. In the greatest political disaster

of his tenure, the President decisively lost the battle of the budget at home. He and all his advisers could henceforth be certain that requests for new spending or—perish the thought—new taxes would split his own party and, probably, send his Gallup rating through the floor.

By then, the Administration also knew that contributions from the allies—who cannot for high political reasons admit who garners what benefits at what cost from Desert Shield, and thus pay as little as they can—would not come near to paying the bill. That left Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the other gulf states as the only source of funds.

Neither the Saudis nor the Kuwaitis are likely to fund their contributions by steadily liquidating their assets. As a practical matter, their support for Desert Shield has to be funded out of current income. But this depends on the price of oil. Accordingly, the Bush Administration needed to keep oil prices high if it wanted to avoid going back to Congress for more money. This it did by the simple expedient of ignoring pleas to open up the strategic petroleum reserve and letting speculative demand drive up the world price at the start.

That move, however, does not constitute a long-run solution. Although oil prices flurry on each war scare, oil is in fact plentiful on the world market and the overall trend has been down for a long time.

Now the full extent of the Administration's November di-
(Continued on Page 92)



ONE REPUBLICAN NATIONAL COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN IN SEARCH OF A PRONUNCIATION

*And who might take a job most pols would want as
much as, say, a goiter?*

Clayton Yeutter.

*Who could they get to do the sort of task best left to
Roto-Rooter?*

Clayton Yeutter.

*Who'll be, to all inside the G.O.P., a meeter and a
greeter?*

Clayton Yeutter.

*Who'll pacify the right-wing nuts who call the
President a traitor?*

Clayton Yeutter.

*Who vows to separate the warring gangs and calm
each kick-and-biter?*

*You couldn't have said it righter. I give you
Chairman Yeutter.*

Calvin Trillin

MINORITY REPORT.

CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS

Venice

*Once did she hold the gorgeous East in fee:
And was the safeguard of the West . . .*

Thus Wordsworth "On the Extinction of the Venetian Republic." Especially in the fog and melancholy of winter, with the bells muffled and the cats cringing in the piazzas and the dome of the Salute sometimes invisible from the opposing bank of the Grand Canal, one can see the place as Europe's most lavish post-imperial museum. Sitting in Florian's cafe, once the resort of the defeated patriots and nationalists of the city, I read Arthur Danto on Titian ("Art," December 31, 1990) and felt bold enough to enter a dissent from his masterly line.

Writing about the current exhibition of Titian's *Flaying of Marsyas*, which he rightly describes as "almost unendurably painful," Danto speculates:

It is a very late painting, and one wonders if it can be a sort of self-portrait: Michelangelo depicted himself in *The Last Judgment* as the flayed skin of Saint Bartholomew. Of course, Marsyas does not look like the aged Titian, who depicted himself as Joseph of Arimathea in an Entombment. But the message could be more universal and more figurative, as if losing one's skin were the equivalent of losing one's artistic powers, even if to a god.

There is a somewhat more historical materialist explanation of the starkness and terror of the painting, put forward by Sydney Freedberg, chief curator of the National Gallery, when *Marsyas* was first hung there in 1986. It is true that the painting was executed very shortly before Titian's death, in 1576. But this was also very shortly after the Venetian Empire had been saved by the destruction of the Turkish fleet at the battle of Lepanto. This victory did something to cancel a terrible earlier humiliation, which was the loss of Cyprus to the Turks in 1571. The Venetian garrison at the Cypriot city of Famagusta (where Othello had once been governor) held out against the forces of Lala Mustapha in one of the epic sieges of the period. But eventually the Venetian commander, Marcantonio Bragadin, was induced to surrender under a promise of safe conduct. No sooner had he done so than he was hideously tortured, flayed alive and exhibited as a trophy. (His stuffed skin later found its way back to Venice as a relic.) This ghastly event, and the loss of a major imperial possession, had a traumatic effect on all Venetians.

Certain details in the painting tend to support Freedberg's interpretation. One of the figures in the group wears a Phrygian cap, which was the symbol of Turkey. Freedberg concludes: "If our assumptions are correct, the idea of the *Marsyas* was born out of the tragedy of Famagusta and the torture of Bragadin, but it was developed in the aftermath of exaltation over Lepanto." Yet "since it was unthinkable in Titian's aesthetic that it could be depicted as a historical occurrence, it had to be represented by an analogue, and the flaying of Marsyas was one ready to hand."

Turning from the glories of San Marco to the inescapable

daily papers, I found that Cyprus kept recurring in discussions of the Persian Gulf crisis. The Yemeni Foreign Minister, refusing James Baker's definition of the singularity of Iraqi aggression (and also refusing a large American handout to his hard-pressed country), had scornfully said that if the United States could finance the invasion and occupation of Cyprus it could stand a little diplomacy in the matter of Kuwait. The Iraqi Ambassador to Washington said the same thing to Representative Stephen Solarz on a Jesse Jackson television show in which I participated. All over the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East the example of a NATO country getting away with annexation and occupation has been remembered, greatly to the vexation of the powers that be in Washington.

In 1974, Famagusta fell to the Turks again. After being badly bombed from the air—it had no military defenses—it was forcibly evacuated, looted and then cordoned off by the Turkish Army. Ever since, it has stood vacant and decaying: a potential "bargaining chip" and a miserable reminder of the refugee status of its 50,000 or so former inhabitants. Turkey has contemptuously ignored repeated United Nations resolutions on the subject, most notably Security Council Resolution 550, passed in 1984, which specifically prohibits the opening of the city to colonists from Turkey. In return for its defiance of the U.N. on this and other aspects of the annexation of northern Cyprus, Turkey receives \$500 million per annum in military aid from the United States—too large a contrast of morality and proportion to be easily overlooked in the circumstances.

Under the cover of Iraq's own regional aggression, the Turkish authorities have been making plans for the settlement of Famagusta by imported colonists. Ever since the summer, there has been a steady escalation of threats to complete the annexation, ostensibly in response to the application by the Republic of Cyprus for full membership in the European Common Market. This membership, if approved, would make nonsense of Turkey's enforced partition of the island and segregation of its people. It would also counter the absorption of northern Cyprus into the mainland Turkish economy. The response of the Bush Administration has been to label both moves—the illegal colonization and the legitimate application—as provocative.

Recently Rauf Denktaş, Turkey's puppet governor on the island, made the opportunistic suggestion that Famagusta might be opened to help settle some Palestinians under Turkish auspices. This transparent maneuver was, I'm glad to say, promptly disowned by the P.L.O. But the threat persists. And the United States, which wants to "hold the gorgeous East in fee" and pose as "safeguard of the West" at the same time, has shown by its attitude that it is unfit to act the part of regional arbiter and dispenser of justice. (It has, of course, shown this before, in Lebanon and the West Bank.) Predecessors far more civilized and intelligent failed at the same task. But when the Pax Americana has evanesced in a shower of petrodollars and Awacs deals, it won't be able to evoke the nostalgia that preceding empires can still command.

WATCHING RIGHTS.

ARYEH NEIER

In May 1989 Chia Thye Poh, a former member of the Singapore Parliament who had been imprisoned since 1966, was released to a form of house arrest. Previously, the government of Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew had insisted that he renounce his membership in the Communist Party of Malaya (C.P.M.) as a condition of release, but Chia had refused. He had always denied that he was a member and argued that to renounce membership would be to acknowledge something that was not true. When Chia was released, Singapore justified its abandonment of its previous condition by asserting that the C.P.M. no longer represented a security threat.

At the time, there was speculation about why Prime Minister Lee, a notoriously vindictive man, had finally decided to let out of prison someone who had persisted in his defiance for so long. One theory had it that South Africa was already indicating that it would release Nelson Mandela and various publications had begun gathering information for what seemed like a good story: With Mandela out, who were the longest-term political prisoners in the world? Chia might be at the head of the list. Little international attention had been paid to Chia Thye Poh over the twenty-three years of his incarceration, but suddenly there was a chance he could become a cause célèbre.

If there is anything to that theory, Singapore must not have been aware that another government in East Asia has been holding political prisoners for a lot longer. Like Chia, they have been held so long largely because of their defiant attitudes. And to a much greater extent than Chia, they have been forgotten. Fifty-seven men—most of them now in their 60s or 70s—are being held by the government of South Korea in Taejon Prison, some seventy miles from Seoul, because they have refused to make “conversion statements” admitting their alleged crimes and recanting their beliefs. Fifteen of them have been held in prison since the 1950s. The two who have been held longest, Kim Sun-myong, an ironworker, and Lee Jong-hwan, a plumber, will mark their fortieth anniversary this year. To the best of my knowledge, they are the longest-serving political prisoners in the world.*

Ten of the long-term prisoners in Taejon had been members of the South Korea Labor Party, which was formed by Communists and others who had been active in the independence struggle leading to Korea's liberation from Japanese rule in 1945. After losing a battle for political power to U.S.-backed forces led by Syngman Rhee (President of South Korea from 1948 to 1960), the party was shattered and one faction merged with North Korea's ruling Korean Workers' Party.

Twelve of the prisoners had been members of the Voluntary Army, formed in the South during the Korean War to assist the North Korean Army. (Some of them were high school

students at the time.) The others were imprisoned at various times by the South Korean government, allegedly for violating security codes that outlawed Communism or for spying on behalf of North Korea.

In most cases it is impossible to tell whether the espionage charges were valid, as the courts before which these men appeared, military or civilian, provided little semblance of a fair trial. Even assuming that some were guilty of espionage, holding them in prison for refusing to write conversion statements is a gross injustice.

As described in a recent Asia Watch report, conversion statements originated in Korea during the period of Japanese rule, from 1910 to 1945. Even today, prisoners convicted on security charges are given a form that includes questions on their thoughts about Communism and democracy. When this form is signed and the prisoner's fingerprint is affixed, it goes to an “examination committee” which reviews it; if it appears satisfactory, the prisoner is summoned for an oral interview by the committee and questioned on the sincerity of his statement. The findings of the committee are then submitted to the Agency for National Security Planning for final determination. Prisoners who resist pressures to write conversion statements are denied certain privileges, such as the right to mingle with other prisoners or to receive visits from anyone other than family. Some are held in solitary confinement. Until 1987, beatings were frequent.

The report refers to these prisoners as South Korea's *plantados*, or “rooted ones.” This is the term used to describe hundreds of long-term prisoners in Cuba—some held for non-violent dissent, others for violent crimes—whose imprisonment was prolonged because they refused to take part in “re-education” programs. Their political defiance, as in the case of the South Korean prisoners, resulted in harsh conditions of confinement. International attention to the *plantados* in the 1980s helped bring pressure on the Castro government to release them; at this writing, there are only two remaining in Cuban prisons.

The South Korean Embassy in Washington took offense at the term *plantados*, asserting in a December 13, 1990, letter to Asia Watch that “there simply is no comparison between human rights in Cuba during the 1980s and the current situation in the Republic of Korea.” The letter went on to justify the isolation of the “non-converted” prisoners. “They are not allowed to mingle with other prisoners to prevent them from propagandizing other inmates. What our penal system is attempting to do is to instill in all prisoners a respect for the laws of our democratic society. This, we feel, is a necessary prerequisite for the release, and reintegration, of prisoners into our society.”

The embassy seems to have missed the point. What was objectionable about the treatment of Cuba's *plantados* was that imprisonment was extended to punish the beliefs prisoners adhered to in prison, not their underlying crimes—if any. So it is with the Taejon “non-converted” prisoners. They have been forgotten for too long. Free them now.

*In a future column, I will examine the various definitions of “political prisoner.” For now, suffice it to say that I think the term is appropriately used when even justified imprisonment is greatly prolonged because the prisoner has refused to recant his or her beliefs.

ARTICLES.

■ 300 DEAD EACH DAY

The Wages Of Work

WILLIAM SERRIN

Since the passage of the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970, some 200,000 workers have been killed on the job in the United States and as many as 2 million more have died from diseases caused by the conditions where they worked. That's 300 dead men, women and children a day. In fact, work kills more people each year than die from AIDS, drugs, or drunken driving and all other motor vehicle accidents. Moreover, another 1.4 million people have been permanently disabled in workplace accidents since the act became law. Yet in those twenty years, only fourteen people have been prosecuted by the Justice Department for workplace safety violations, and only one person, a South Dakota construction contractor who was convicted in the deaths of two workers in a trench cave-in, has gone to jail—for forty-five days.

"If fifteen executives go down in an airplane, there are long obituaries, stories all over the place," says Tony Mazzocchi, secretary-treasurer of the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers International Union (O.C.A.W.I.U.) and for two decades a leading advocate of improved safety on the job. But, he adds, even an accident that kills several workers—for example, the explosion at the Phillips Petroleum Company plastics plant in Pasadena, Texas, in October 1989 that killed twenty-three workers, or the explosion at the Arco Chemical Company plant near Houston last July that took seventeen lives—is given attention for only a few days and then usually forgotten. (The record \$3.48 million fine that the Occupational Safety and Health Administration recently levied on Arco came about without prosecution and without acknowledgment of fault by the company.) When a scaffold breaks loose and a window washer plummets to his death, some people simply shrug and say, well, the worker assumes the risk of death or injury on the job, even though OSHA requires that employers provide a safe workplace. Joseph Kinney, executive director of the National Safe Workplace Institute in Chicago, says others try to explain away accidents by saying they were simply "God's will," even when unsafe practices were obviously involved. But the principal reason dead and injured workers don't attract much attention is what it has always been: class. As Harley Shaiken, a professor of work and technology at the University of California, San Diego, puts it, "If these were lawyers getting killed, if there was an epidemic

of deaths among stockbrokers, everybody would be doing pieces, *The New York Times*, *60 Minutes*, you name it."

The U.S. workplace has always been hazardous. The Avondale mine fire near Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, killed 108 miners—men and boys—in 1869; at least twenty-five workers died during construction of the Brooklyn Bridge, completed in 1883; and a fire at New York City's Triangle Shirtwaist Company in 1911 took the lives of 146 workers, all of them women, many in their teens. At least 700 deaths were caused by construction of the Hawks Nest Tunnel, a river diversion project at Gauley Mountain, West Virginia, completed in 1930. The workers died in the following years from silicosis and other lung diseases contracted from drilling into the mountain, which was composed largely of silica. The managers knew about the silica; the workers did not.

Because OSHA was established to curb this kind of dereliction and suffering, the workplace should be safer than in the past, especially given advances in medicine and emergency services, the introduction of new and generally safer machinery and the movement from an industrial to a service economy. Yet not only do workers continue to die in staggering numbers but they often perish in the most wretched ways: asphyxiated in silos and trench cave-ins, electrocuted installing or repairing power lines or equipment, blown up in refinery or mine explosions, chopped up in grinding and cutting machines, scalded and burned to death in iron and steel explosions. Others die after being sick for years with black lung, brown lung, cancer or chemical or radiation poisoning. Still others are disfigured or disabled by the loss of a finger, an arm, a leg, their sight or, through paralysis, their mobility. To be grimly specific:

In September 1989 ten miners died in a methane explosion at the Pyro Mining Company's William Station mine in Union County, Kentucky. The Labor Department found numerous electrical safety violations and has proposed a fine against the firm of \$508,000. In December 1988 Dennis Claypool, 21, and Mark DeMoss, 18, were suffocated as they cleaned a tanker trailer at a trucking company outside Chicago. The tanker had recently been cleaned with nitrogen, which removes oxygen from the tank. The two did not know of the nitrogen cleaning. Some 300 workers a year die in such "confined space" incidents.

In June 1989 17-year-old Jesse Colson was killed as he delivered a pizza for Domino's in Indianapolis. At the time, the chain's outlet was running a "King of the Lates" program, in which the driver who had the most late deliveries was made to wear a badge calling attention to his or her tardiness. Colson died when his car went out of control and crashed as he was hurrying to make a delivery. At the workplace institute Kinney has documented some twenty deaths involving Domino's deliveries in 1988 alone, and he believes that more than 100 persons—deliverers and bystanders—have been killed in Domino's accidents since the early 1980s. Yet the company continues its policy of promising a reduced price if its pizzas are not delivered within thirty minutes.

William Serrin, a former labor correspondent for The New York Times, is writing a book about the collapse of the American steel industry.

"We have better data on cattle slaughter in the United States than we do on work-related deaths and injuries," says Kinney, a former consultant to livestock buyers and sellers. In 1986 his 26-year-old brother, Paul, was killed in the collapse of a scaffold in Denver, for which the employer was ultimately fined \$800. The following year Kinney founded the workplace institute and since then has been a tireless advocate of job safety. The nation must be made to understand, he says, that many employers operate with "knowing recklessness."

Beyond the cruel human toll is the financial cost: \$48 billion a year in workers' compensation costs paid by private insurers, plus billions more in Social Security and health payments, much of it reflected in higher prices for goods and services. Employers know it is cheaper to purchase insurance and pass on costs to workers and other consumers than to make the workplace safer.

Improving job safety is a formidable task. In the 1980s some 15 million workers were displaced from their jobs. Many of them have been unemployed for as long as ten years. For many today, job safety is far less important than simply having work—any work. Meanwhile, economic restructuring is bringing a faster job pace and other means of increased productivity, such as subcontracting, elimination of relief crews, forced overtime, reduction of work forces and lack of preventive maintenance. "The drive for production is out of control," says the O.C.A.W.I.U.'s Mazzocchi. In the oil-refining and petrochemical industries, production flows have been increased while large layoffs, often of experienced workers, have occurred. Tasks that laid-off workers had performed have been given to an estimated 40,000 temporary contract employees, many of them ill trained.

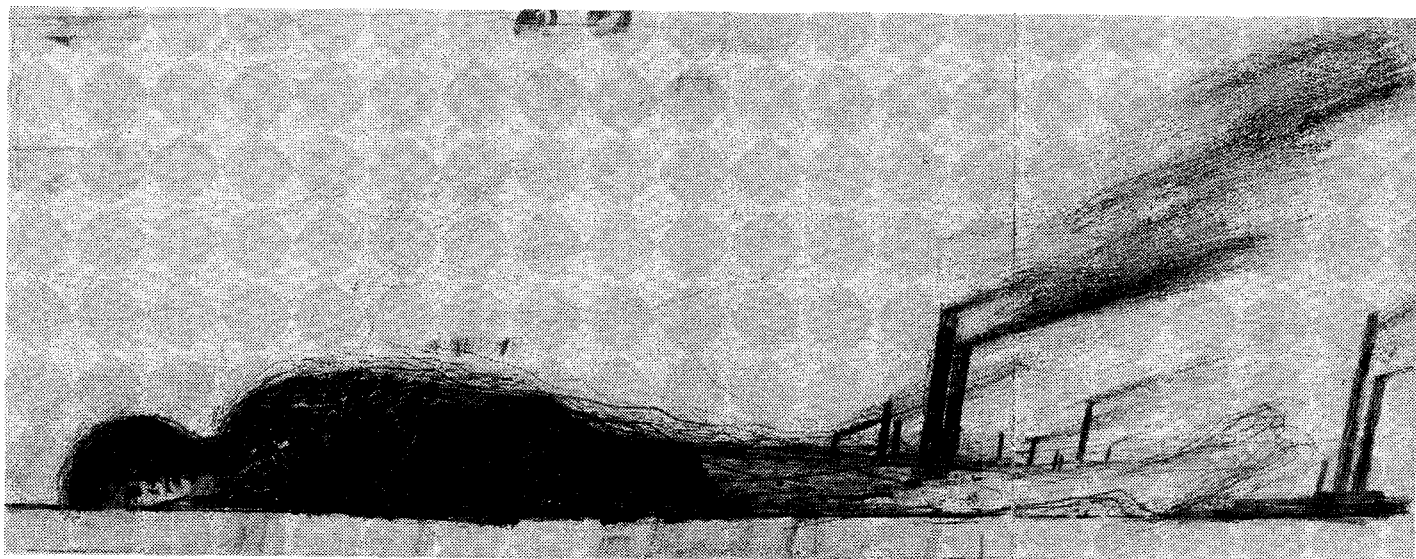
In the past, many unions paid a certain lip service to workplace safety but saved their hard bargaining to win better wages, fringe benefits and vacations. With the decline of unionism, most labor leaders are paying even less attention. One of the major faults of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, for example, is not the corruption that receives most attention but the union's lack of interest in job safety,

even though trucking kills 2,100 workers a year. Only now, twenty-five years after the introduction of seat belts, is the Labor Department moving to order that they be worn by trucking and delivery workers. The department believes this would save an estimated 685 lives a year. Neither the teamsters nor other unions have had significant involvement in the government's seat-belt ruling.

Meanwhile, policing the problem is a nearly impossible task for OSHA. The nation has some 7 million workplaces, and more than half the 118 million workers labor in companies with fewer than a hundred employees. To inspect this vast domain, OSHA has about 1,300 inspectors and a budget that has been eviscerated during the Reagan-Bush years. Adjusted for inflation, OSHA's current annual budget of \$285.2 million is less now than it was in the 1970s. For fiscal year 1981, workplace health received \$1 for every \$1,579 in the federal budget; for 1991, it will receive \$1 for every \$2,408. "An employer doesn't have to be an Einstein to figure out that you probably won't be inspected," says Mazzocchi. To make matters worse, OSHA often goes about its tasks with little zeal. Frequently, it has adopted as its health and safety guidelines the existing industry standards, or it has gone to business-dominated organizations like the National Safety Council for guidelines.

Police departments and local, state and federal prosecutors generally do not regard job-safety violations as criminal conduct, although Kinney praises the Los Angeles County prosecutor's office, which in recent years has gained convictions in several workplace safety cases, including jail sentences in one incident involving a worker killed by the collapse of an unsupported wall and another involving a worker who suffocated while being lowered, on orders from his superior, into a deep, narrow pit. Many employers insist that, since OSHA is a federal law, only federal prosecutors can bring job-safety cases, although in Illinois, Wisconsin, Michigan and New York, supreme courts have ruled that the state can prosecute employers for failing to maintain safe workplaces.

Under federal law, the government can bring criminal charges only when death occurs and evidence of willful vio-



ILLUSTRATIONS BY LARRY CARROLL

lation of the law exists. The maximum fine the Labor Department can impose for health and safety violations is \$70,000 per infraction, but most fines are less than \$100. The maximum jail term for first-time work-safety offenses is six months. In its twenty years of existence, OSHA has referred only sixty-eight cases to the Justice Department for prosecution, and today OSHA still employs no criminal investigator itself.

A model job-safety program for unions, put forth by the O.C.A.W.I.U., would require by contract that companies prepare public job-safety assessments with their insurance firms, increase job protection for whistleblowers, insure workers against wage losses when unsafe facilities are condemned by the government and allow workers to halt unsafe operations and refuse unsafe work without fear of intimidation. Such measures would allow workers, who often are the first to know when unsafe workplace conditions exist and have the most to lose from unsafe practices, to insist that businesses be run safely, Mazzocchi and other union safety experts say.

But such measures are unlikely to be widely approved in union contracts or by law, even though they are probably the best way to attack workplace deaths and injuries. Giving workers power runs counter to the American notion of how the workplace should be organized. Employers and most unions resist this, believing that a powerful work force would undermine their authority. In fact, in recent years many unions have joined employers in cooperative programs designed to increase competitiveness, which often means a faster pace and reduced safety and health. Nor can it be assumed that the federal government will be more vigorous in confronting employers over workplace safety and health. In 1990, Congressional legislation would have increased penalties for workplace safety violations, among other things making employers liable to prison terms of up to five years in cases involving serious injuries and ten years in cases involving deaths. The legislation failed, without coming to a full vote in either the House or the Senate. Business interests helped kill the measures, so Kinney, backed by foundation grants, has launched a campaign to establish a national grass-roots organization composed of victims of workplace injuries and disease and their friends and relatives. He hopes this will be an aggressive movement, bringing pressure on the federal government to make the workplace safer. "Normal discourse doesn't cut it," he says. Shaiken agrees: "It's all a matter of the big guys not caring about the little guys." □

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■ SEOUL ON ICE

How Long Yet for Korea's Cold War?

TIM SHORROCK

Last fall, the Prime Ministers of North and South Korea began the highest-level discussions between their two states since the end of the Korean War in 1953 and, for the first time, agreed to talk about arms control. These talks came at a time of political realignment that is changing, perhaps forever, the cold war framework that has defined Northeast Asia since the United States and the Soviet Union accepted the surrender of Imperial Japan in 1945. Last September the Soviet Union and South Korea opened full diplomatic relations, and Kim Il Sung, the President of North Korea, offered to normalize economic and political ties with Japan. In October, China and South Korea signed a commercial treaty; in 1989 the former enemies engaged in trade worth more than \$3 billion.

The driving force here is economics. The Russians and the Chinese are looking to South Korea for capital, management skills and technology. Japan is gambling that a diplomatic breakthrough in Korea will strengthen its dominance of the emerging East Asia trade bloc, which Japanese business leaders view as a possible counterweight to a united Europe and a North American common market. Export-conscious South Korea, which faces stiff competition from Mexico and other low-wage producers, sees China and Eastern Europe as promising new markets for its advanced electronic, automobile and steel industries. Meanwhile, North Korea is facing economic disaster unless it can replace its former socialist trading partners with new capitalist ones, reduce its military spending (20 percent of its G.N.P.) and shift resources into consumer goods industries.

The United States has 39,000 troops and more than 100 nuclear weapons in South Korea. But rather than use its considerable influence to support reconciliation in Asia, the Bush Administration continues to view Korea through the prism of the cold war. Despite South Korea's overwhelming economic strength vis-à-vis the North, its superiority in military technology and its two-to-one advantage in population, the Administration insists that U.S. forces must stay in South Korea as a deterrent against the North and other potential aggressors, regardless of progress in the North-South dialogue or the revolutionary changes in Soviet policy in Europe and Asia.

"The United States is in Korea not only for Korean interests but first and foremost for our own," declared Paul Wolfowitz, Under Secretary of Defense and a key participant in Korea policy, in a June 1990 speech. "Those American

Tim Shorrock is a Washington-based journalist who specializes in East Asian business and political affairs.

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forces in Korea constitute an element of a regional presence and basing structure that contributes to the fundamental stability of the whole Pacific region."

That position, a restatement of the U.S. Korea policy that has prevailed since 1953, hardened recently after U.S. intelligence estimated that the North was four to five years away from developing nuclear weapons. Until North Korea agrees to allow international inspections of its nuclear research facilities, the United States says, normal diplomatic contacts with the North—and certainly talks on the reduction of forces—are impossible. Although the North signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in 1985, it wants the United States to promise never to use nuclear weapons in Korea before it will agree to the inspections that the treaty mandates.

It is highly unlikely that Pyongyang would have started its research without the threatening presence of U.S. nuclear-tipped missiles and land mines in the South. But American officials—who generally view Kim Il Sung as a Stalinist reincarnation of Genghis Khan—angrily dismiss any such linkage. At a recent conference in Washington on Korean security, a C.I.A. officer snapped at me, "There's no connection. Atomic bombs are just another arrow in the North's growing quiver of weapons."

But the hard-line U.S. attitude toward North Korea may be softening with the end of the cold war in Europe and the continued extraordinary growth of the South Korean economy. Last April, partly in response to Senate protectionists who want the South to pay more for its defense, the Pentagon said it would remove some 7,000 "nonessential" U.S. troops from Korea over the next three years and eventually transfer control of the U.S.-Korea Combined Forces Command to a Korean general. In September 157 members of the House voted for a resolution calling on the Bush Administration to set a permanent ceiling of 30,000 troops in Korea and take steps to reduce tensions on the peninsula. The resolution lost by a hundred votes, but the unprecedented number of yeas for an issue once considered off-limits indicates a sea change in Congressional attitudes toward Korea.

Still, with hawkish Democrats like Representative Stephen

Solarz setting the Korea agenda on Capitol Hill, no one expects Congress to call for a troop withdrawal anytime soon. "Solarz can hold the line in the House on his own," observes Daryl Plunk, a Korea specialist affiliated with the Heritage Foundation and an advocate for strong U.S.-South Korean military ties.

Unfortunately, the strong bipartisan support for Washington's alliance with Seoul does not bode well for Korea, where North and South are divided over fundamental questions that, like the troop issue, go to the heart of U.S. policy. The South, backed by the United States, wants dual membership in the United Nations for Seoul and Pyongyang; the North wants to share a single seat with Seoul, a position recently endorsed by South Korean opposition leader Kim Dae Jung. The North wants a comprehensive arms-control and non-aggression treaty that would eventually lead to a confederation of the two states, with both maintaining their economic and political systems; the South wants American troops to stay and dismisses the confederation plan as unrealistic. Seoul also wants the two sides to engage in "confidence-building measures" such as increased cultural exchanges and reductions of North Korea's forces on the border before embarking on formal arms-control negotiations.

Both Seoul and Washington have criticized Pyongyang for its "inflexible" stance in the North-South talks, which are scheduled to resume in February. But since 1987 Kim Il Sung has repeatedly called for a reduction of military forces over a three- to four-year period, down to 100,000 troops on both sides from their current levels of nearly 1 million in the North and 750,000 in the South. During that time, he said, U.S. forces in Korea would gradually be withdrawn. This is a huge concession from Kim's previous insistence that the United States had to pull out completely before he would begin negotiating seriously with Seoul.

Kim's speech, together with North Korea's return of the remains of several U.S. war dead in May and its presence at nine international conferences on arms control (including two in Washington) over the past year, has convinced some U.S. conservatives that the North is serious about



wanting to end the stalemate. "What would possibly hold Kim from an invasion now?" asks William Taylor, a military analyst with the Center for Strategic and International Studies. With the United States preparing for a major war in the Persian Gulf, Kim "will never, ever have a better chance. That leads me to believe that these overtures from the North are real."

In another defection from the standard U.S. line, Gaston Sigur, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs in the Reagan Administration, told a Congressional panel last July that he favored taking Pyongyang off the official terrorist list and suggested inviting key North Korean leaders to Washington for talks with Congress and the White House. (That switch by Sigur, a key architect of U.S.-South Korean relations during the 1980s, "was a real shocker," a leading Congressional expert on Korea told me.) And recently Solarz proposed that the United States accept a nuclear-free zone in Korea—which the North has also called for.

But despite the spectacular success of South Korean diplomacy with the Soviet Union and China, President Roh Tae Woo is nervous about a relaxation of U.S. ties with North Korea. Roh, who last month became the first South Korean head of state to visit the Kremlin, opposes direct talks between Washington and Pyongyang and sharply criticized Japan for its recent moves to mend fences with the North. And the Roh government continues to use its draconian National Security Law to jail dissidents who express views that deviate from Seoul's anti-Communist line. According to the Korean National Council of Churches, there are 1,300 political prisoners in South Korean jails.

Clearly the stage is set for a major shift in U.S. priorities, which have not changed since 1988, when the Reagan Administration opened low-level diplomatic talks with North Korea in Beijing. For starters, Washington should follow Moscow's lead and open direct, high-level talks with Pyongyang on arms control, lift its embargo on trade with the North and make a commitment to withdraw U.S. forces from the peninsula under a negotiated, guaranteed peace agreement. To prepare the ground for such talks and give North Korea an opportunity to settle the nuclear issue, Washington should unilaterally end the annual "Team Spirit" military exercises in Korea and withdraw its nuclear arsenal from the South. It should lean on Seoul to release political prisoners, particularly students and clergy convicted of traveling to North Korea and the 154 long-term detainees, some of whom have been incarcerated since the early days of the Korean War [see Aryeh Neier, "Watching Rights," page 79].

Finally, the United States should expand its ties beyond South Korea's military and business elite and listen, for once, to the millions of Koreans—North and South—who, after half a century of Japanese colonization, three terrible years of war and a generation of division, deserve the right to determine their own destiny without foreign interference. Unless the United States is prepared to offer concessions as significant as those made by the Soviet Union to pave the way for the reunification of Germany, Korea will remain divided and in a perpetual state of war. □

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■ FALSE PROPHET—II

All for One and None for All

ADOLPH REED JR.

The hypocrisy in the white reaction to Louis Farrakhan's "hate mongering" is transparent. And beneath the platitudes and fatuities about Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream, black Americans are aware of the dual standard governing public outcry. David Duke's racism and anti-Semitism have been more direct and vitriolic than Farrakhan's [see Elinor Langer, "The American Neo-Nazi Movement Today," July 16/23, 1990], but Duke has not provoked comparable public anxiety and denunciation—despite the fact that the ex-Nazi/Klansman has won a seat as a Louisiana State Representative, has run as a "legitimate" candidate for the U.S. Senate and harbors gubernatorial intentions. The heavy metal group Guns n' Roses maintains a repertoire that is unremittingly and unapologetically misogynistic, homophobic, racist and xenophobic, yet the group has escaped the outrage and public censure heaped upon the no more (nor less, certainly) racist and misogynistic Public Enemy. The scurrilous Andrew Dice Clay is granted television specials and a film contract; the no more repugnant 2 Live Crew is censored for obscenity. Recognition of this hypocritical Jim Crow standard for targeting public scorn naturally breeds resentment and racial defensiveness. The retrograde racial climate fostered by Reaganism particularly stimulates that defensive tendency. It is also reinforced and cultivated by black elites of all sorts—from the national civil rights advocacy organizations, the Congressional Black Caucus and Jesse Jackson to small-town politicians, journalists and academics, who opportunistically reproduce a political discourse among black citizens that takes race as its only significant category of critical analysis.

The Marion Barry case exemplifies the dangerous limitations of that discourse. With very few honest exceptions, black spokespersons failed to take a principled stand denouncing both the Bush Administration's disingenuous, irresponsible (and yes, racist) use of public power in pursuit of Barry and the Mayor's culpability—not simply for his tawdry personal life but, much more seriously, for the contempt and neglect that his entire pattern of governance has directed toward his poor black constituents. One source of the reticence is the mutual protectiveness that operates within all elite networks; it is intensified no doubt by being in a beleaguered community. But it also reflects the absence of explicit norms of civic life and ideals of political economy other than those connected immediately to principles of equity among racial groups. Without such norms and ideals, race stands out as the sole un-

equivocal criterion of good and bad, right and wrong, truth and falsity. That context nurtures a variety of demagogues, hustlers and charlatans; in addition, it underlies an important characteristic of Farrakhan's black support.

Farrakhan has been attacked so vigorously and singularly *in part* because he is black. He is seen by whites as a symbol embodying, and therefore justifying, their fears of a black peril. Blacks have come to his defense *mainly* because he is black and perceived to be a victim of racially inspired defamation; he gets points in principle for saying things that antagonize whites. Few who rally to vindicate him know or have anything substantive to say about his program; most defend him as a strong black voice that whites want to silence. Farrakhan's wager is that he can build a personal following by asserting his apparent victimization as de facto evidence of political legitimacy.

Can he succeed? To what extent has he already succeeded? What difference does it make whether or not he ensconces himself as a major force in national Afro-American politics? The first two questions, commonly asked, express clear, immediate concerns but can be answered only contingently. The third is almost never asked, but it goes to the heart of the most disturbing qualities of the Farrakhan controversy and what it says about the state of black politics.

If mass conversion to the Nation of Islam is the measure of success, then Farrakhan does not seem to have got very far. Nor is it likely that he will. The organization's strict dietary code and other behavioral disciplines—not to mention its bizarre and non-Christian theology—greatly limit his membership pool, as they did Elijah Muhammad's. There is, however, an intermediate zone between adhering to the Nation's doctrines and *pro forma* support, and I suspect that is the terrain on which Farrakhan has staked his aspirations.

He seems to have made some headway, at least within the college-age population, in propagating an image of himself as the quintessential representative of black assertiveness. Black student groups now almost routinely make headlines and raise hackles by paying top-shelf lecture fees (reportedly \$17,000 for speaker and entourage at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst) to hear Farrakhan's message. And those in both college and noncollege networks drop his name as a signifier of being conversant with the state of chic in race militancy, just as semireverent, faux intimate invocations of Michael Jordan or Teddy Riley convey being *au courant* in other contexts.

Embracing Farrakhan's image—like wearing an Africa medallion—is an act of vicarious empowerment. More clearly on the campuses but probably outside student life as well, it is a totemic act of the sort distinctive to mass-consumption culture: highly salient but without clear meaning, effortlessly accessible but somehow bestowing in-group status. For college students, inviting Farrakhan forges identity with a power that counterattacks racism and isolation and soothes the anxieties around upward mobility or class maintenance. For non-students, invoking his name forges identity with a power that consoles fleetingly in the face of a marginalized life showing little hope for improvement.

Not surprisingly, the youthful Farrakhan constituency in

This is the second of two articles. Adolph Reed Jr. is professor of political science at Yale University.

each domain seems preponderantly male. On the one hand, Farrakhan's stridency and martial style have a distinctly macho appeal. On the other, women of any stratum are not likely to respond enthusiastically to his philosophy, which assigns them subordinate status in a patriarchal family, stresses childbearing and child raising as their main functions and ties them to the domestic realm in a state of modified purdah.

How far that kind of ephemeral constituency can go is an open question. Some slender cohort will enter the Nation of Islam from the student and nonstudent populations, and Farrakhan's decision to have the Nation operate in electoral politics will probably help campus recruitment by providing a visible public career path, though that tactic has yet to produce any substantive victories. The vast majority will either retain a mainly symbolic identification by recycling signature catch phrases, lose interest entirely or move back and forth between those two positions according to the vagaries of biography.

Farrakhan's focus on self-help and moral revitalization meshes perfectly with the victim-blaming orthodoxy of the Reagan-Bush era.

The impetus to invite Farrakhan to speak on campuses is driven by a combination of localized *cri de coeur* and protest, competition and solidarity with black students at other institutions, faddishness and racially mediated adolescent rebelliousness and anxiety. But what happens when he comes? What message does he deliver? What do students hear and how do they receive it? What can that tell us about the depth and meaning of his support?

For many the act of consuming the event is the principal gratification. In that sense going to a Farrakhan speech is identical to going to an M.C. Hammer concert; it is the happening place to be at the moment. Farrakhan is a masterful performer and spellbinding orator. He offers his audience a safely contained catharsis: visceral rebellion without dangerous consequences, an instant, painless inversion of power and status relations. As a talented demagogue, Farrakhan mingles banalities, half-truths, distortions and falsehoods to buttress simplistic and wacky theories. The result is a narrative in which he takes on the role of racial conscience and, in Malcolm's old phrase, "tells it like it is." He cajoles, berates, exhorts, instructs and consoles—all reassuringly, without upsetting the framework of conservative petit-bourgeois convention.

Indeed, Farrakhan has reproduced the contradiction within the old Nation of Islam, the tension between militant posture and conservative program. But that contradiction fits the ambivalent position of the student audience. Their racial militancy often rests atop basically conventional, if not

conservative, aspirations: for example, the desire to penetrate—or create black-controlled alternatives to—the "glass ceiling" barring access to the upper reaches of corporate wealth and power. Radical rhetoric is attractive when it speaks to their frustrations as members of a minority, as long as it does not conflict with their hopes for corporate success and belief in their own superiority to a benighted black "underclass."

The combination of cathartic, feel-good militancy and conservative substance is the source as well of whatever comparable following Farrakhan may have generated among the older population. It is also what makes him a dangerous force in American life—quite apart from what he thinks of whites in general or Jews in particular. He weds a radical, oppositional style to a program that proposes private and individual responses to social problems; he endorses moral repressiveness; he asserts racial essentialism; he affirms male authority; and he lauds bootstrap capitalism. In defining his and the Nation's role as bringing the holy word to a homogeneous but defective population, moreover, he has little truck for cultivation of democratic debate among Afro-Americans, and he is quick to castigate black critics with the threatening language of race treason.

Reports of Farrakhan's growing presence typically note that the crowds drawn to his speaking tours include many older, apparently well-off people who indicate that they appreciate his message of race pride and self-help community development. Observers from Benjamin Hooks to Phil Donahue have anointed his antidrug and bootstrap rhetoric as level-headed and unobjectionable, the stuff of an appropriate and reasonable approach to the problems of black inner cities. But his focus on self-help and moral revitalization is profoundly reactionary and meshes perfectly with the victim-blaming orthodoxy of the Reagan/Bush era.

To Farrakhan the most pressing problems confronting the poor and working-class Afro-American population are not poverty and dispossession themselves but their putative behavioral and attitudinal byproducts: drugs, crime, social "pathology." In an August interview in *Emerge* he declared that to improve black Americans' condition it is necessary first to "recognize that we as a people are sick." In his March 13, 1990, *Donahue* appearance he maintained that blacks suffer from a dependent, welfare mentality inculcated in slavery; there and elsewhere (in a March 1, 1990, *Washington Post* interview, for example) he has implicitly trivialized and challenged the propriety of the Thirteenth Amendment, alleging that at Emancipation the infantilized blacks "didn't have the mentality of a free people to go and do for ourselves." (In this view Farrakhan echoes not only Daniel Patrick Moynihan's notorious 1965 report on the black family but also much older racist representations: the common belief in the early twentieth century that emancipated blacks would die out because of their incompetence at independent life in civilized society and the antebellum view that justified slavery as a humanitarian service for childlike savages who could not exist independently.)

Farrakhan romanticizes the segregation era as a time of black business success and laments that "throughout the

South the economic advancement that we gained under Jim Crow is literally dead." He suggested in *Emerge* that civil rights legislation has done black citizens general harm because "women, gays, lesbians and Jews have taken advantage of civil rights laws, antidiscrimination laws, housing laws, and they have marched on to a better life while the people who made it happen are going farther and farther behind economically." He proposed the "real solution" in a very sympathetic July 23, 1990, interview in *The Spotlight*, organ of the ultra-reactionary Liberty Lobby:

If I am sick and I'm a member of your household and I have a communicable disease, what you do (so that the disease does not affect the whole family) you remove me from the house and you put me in a place which is separate to allow me to come back to health. Then I can return to my family. Here, when people have been under oppression for 400 years, it produces an ill effect. . . . You have . . . millions of [Black] people who are out of it in terms of our ability to take advantage of even the laws that are on the books right now. We are not creating jobs for ourselves. We are sitting in a dependent posture waiting for white people to create a job for us. And if you don't create a job for us we threaten to picket or wait on welfare to come.

Farrakhan's views of politics and government also share significant features with the Reaganite right. The flip side of his self-help notion is rejection of government responsibility for the welfare of the citizenry. The highly touted Muslim "Dopebusters" drug program in Washington's Mayfair Mansions (where I lived as a child, incidentally) is, after all, advertised as a case of successful privatization. Predictably, Farrakhan shows little regard for the state's integrity as a secular institution. In announcing the Nation's foray into running candidates for public office (for the Washington school board and two Congressional seats, one of them contested by Dr. Abdul Alim Muhammad of Dopebusters fame), he maintained in the Nation's organ, *The Final Call*, that politics needs "somebody trained in divine law, then trained in the law of the land" and announced that the Nation of Islam has been "given by Allah the right guidance for our people and the right guidance for our nation." Like Reagan, he assumes the classic demagogic tack of an antipolitical politics, presenting himself and his subalterns as redeemers coming from outside the political realm and untainted by its corruptions. Their mission is to bring moral order.

Clearly, this is a very disturbing, regressive social vision, and it is instructive that Farrakhan has received the Liberty Lobby's enthusiastic stamp of approval. The good news is that his vision is most unlikely to win mass Afro-American adherence; the bad news is that doing so is not a necessary condition for Farrakhan's becoming a central race spokesperson. Instead, he seems to be following the route that Jesse Jackson pioneered.

With his 1983 speaking tour Jackson gained acclamation as a paramount figure in Afro-American politics by parlaying media images of enthusiastic audiences into a claim to represent a mass constituency. He succeeded without having articulated a program or coherent vision for those supposed constituents to accept or reject. In claiming to embody their

aspirations simply in his being, he also sought to merge collective racial fortunes into his own, a strategy that entailed defining support of Jackson as an act of race loyalty.

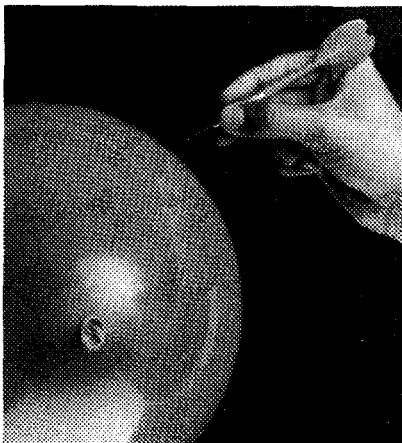
Jackson's strategy exploited longstanding and hegemonic presumptions in American society that black people naturally speak with a single voice as a racial group, that the "leaders" who express the collective racial interest emerge organically from the population and that the objectives and interests of those organic leaders are identical with those of the general racial constituency. Those presumptions eliminate the need to attend to potentially troublesome issues of accountability, legitimacy and democratic process among Afro-Americans, and they give whites easy, uncomplicated access to a version of black thinking by condensing the entire race into a few designated spokespersons. They also simplify the management of racial subordination by allowing white elites to pick and choose among pretenders to race leadership and, at their own discretion, to confer "authenticity." Thus Jackson generated the dynamic of personalistic legitimation that created his national status almost as self-fulfilling prophecy, without regard to the specific character of his popular support. Jackson has shown that it is possible to penetrate the innermost circles of the national race-relations management elite without coming from a clearly denominated organizational, electoral or institutional base. Farrakhan could follow that same path, though he might be constrained as well as aided by the fact that he does have an organizational base, and by that base's particular nature.

The same essentially Victorian view of inner-city black poor as incompetent and morally defective that undergirds Farrakhan's agenda suffuses the discourse of the black petite bourgeoisie.

Operation PUSH under Jackson was purely an extension of his person, and it cohered around opportunism as a *raison d'être*. The National Rainbow Coalition Inc. today is an organizational fiction. Both have therefore been well suited to the protean style that Jackson employed to establish himself first as embodiment of insurgent mass racial aspirations and then as generic "moral force" in elite national political circles. While the Nation of Islam is an extension of Farrakhan's objectives, it also has a governing ideology and world view. He may be limited—in the same way that he hampered Wallace Muhammad—in his ability to bend that orthodoxy to suit his immediate political purposes.

Farrakhan may differ from Jackson in yet another consequential way. Where Jackson's history has been marked by self-promotion more than propagation of a durable set of beliefs, Farrakhan—though obviously opportunistic—has built

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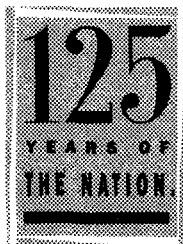
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his career and organization around a clear, aggressive ideology. His ambitions appear to be in a way narrower, in a way broader than Jackson's. Farrakhan is more likely to be content with a status defined in purely racial terms and has been less inclined to moderate his race line in exchange for access to privileged insider status. On his own and through the Nation he has been sharply censorious and disparaging of what he construes as Jackson's knuckling under to white criticism. In part, I suspect, that difference reflects the fact that Farrakhan has an organizational apparatus that permits him to maximize the returns of a purely racial focus by engineering symbols of legitimacy and continual mobilization (rallies, conferences, community visibility). The difference also underscores the fact that Farrakhan's ideology decrees an explicit racial mission—purification (by the Nation's standards) of Afro-American life. Unlike Jackson, who has capitalized on the image of control of the black American population, Farrakhan wants real control.

The idea that black racial interests can be embodied in a single individual has always been attractively economical for white elites.

His suggestion that some 600,000 incarcerated blacks be released to his authority in Africa is more than a publicity stunt. It expresses a belief that in the best-case scenario he should be put in charge of black Americans. His request in the *Washington Post* interview to be "allowed the freedom to teach black people unhindered" sounds mild enough, but only because it leaves ambiguous what he considers improper hindrances. Opposition of any sort falls into that category, and his 1984 threat to Milton Coleman for race treason in the "Hymietown" affair reveals the place of dissent in the society he would make. Of the model of racial authority he would assert, he makes a revealing comparison in the *Emerge* interview: "I am to black people as the Pope is to white people." That enlarged self-image can approach a lunatic megalomania. He alleges in *Emerge* that the revival of interest in Malcolm X is the work of a conspiracy aimed at undermining his mission; to *The Washington Post* he traced the spread of crack in inner cities to a similar conspiracy against him, and he claimed to have been transported in 1985 into a spaceship where Elijah Muhammad gave him general instructions and prophesied Reagan's attack on Libya.

How can it be that Farrakhan's actual vision of and for black America has been so noncontroversial? Why have the civil rights establishment and other liberal black opinion leaders not publicly expressed more vocal concern about its protofascist nature and substance? Some of the reticence may derive from fear of being attacked for race disloyalty, but the black petit-bourgeois chorus of praise for the Nation's rhetoric of self-help and moral rearmament reveals a deeper

reason for the absence of criticism. The same repugnant, essentially Victorian view of the inner-city black poor as incompetent and morally defective that undergirds Farrakhan's agenda suffuses the political discourse of the black petite bourgeoisie. That view informs the common sense, moreover, even of many of those identified with the left. Of course, not many would admit to the level of contempt that Farrakhan has expressed publicly:

Not one of you [*Spotlight* editorial staff] would mind, maybe, my living next door to you, because I'm a man of a degree of intelligence, of moral character. I'm not a wild, partying fellow. I'm not a noisemaker. I keep my home very clean and my lawn very nice. . . . With some of us who have learned how to act at home and abroad, you might not have problems. . . . Drive through the ghettos, and see our people. See how we live. Tell me that you want your son or daughter to marry one of these. No, you won't.

Some, like Harvard sociologist Orlando Patterson, share Farrakhan's contention that the black poor's pathology is a product of the slavery experience. Others, like the Carter Administration's Equal Employment Opportunity Commission director and newly elected Washington Congressional delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton or Chicago sociologist William Julius Wilson, maintain that this pathology is a phenomenon of the post-World War II or even postsegregation era. Still others, like Roger Wilkins, have embraced both narratives of origin. There is, however, nearly unanimous agreement with Farrakhan's belief that defective behavior and attitudes are rampant among the poor. In a recent article in *Dissent*, Patterson points to an underclass bent on "violence and destruction." Norton, calling for "Restoring the Traditional Black Family" in *The New York Times Magazine* (June 2, 1985), sees a "self-perpetuating culture of the ghetto," a "destructive ethos" that forms a "complicated, predatory ghetto subculture." Wilson frets over the "sharp increase in social pathologies in ghetto communities" in his opus on urban poverty, *The Truly Disadvantaged* (1987). Wilkins cites in *The New York Times* the authority of Samuel Proctor—retired Rutgers professor, civil rights veteran and minister emeritus of Harlem's Abyssinian Baptist Church—who fears that the "uneducated, illiterate, impoverished, violent underclass" will "grow like a cancer," producing "losers who are destroying our schools . . . who are unparented and whose communities are morally bankrupt." Being associated with the more radical left does not imply immunity from the rhetoric of spreading pathology among the black poor. In *The Progressive* Manning Marable reproduces uncritically the mirage of "growing numbers of juvenile pregnancies" among his litany of "intractable social problems proliferating" in black inner cities despite his observation that such problems have structural causes and his call for good social-democratic solutions. Cornel West in *Prophetic Fragments* sounds the alarm about the cities' "cultural decay and moral disintegration."

This often lurid imagery of pathology naturally points toward a need for behavioral modification, moral regeneration and special tutelage by black betters, and black middle-class paternalism is as shameless and self-serving now as at the turn of the century. Patterson, Norton, Wilson and Wilkins an-

nounce the middle class's special role in making certain that the poor are fit into properly two-parent, male-headed families. Proctor, presumably giving up on adults, wants to use military discipline to insure that children have "breakfasts with others at a table." West would send them into churches for moral rehabilitation. And the Committee on Policy for Racial Justice of the Joint Center for Political Studies (whose members include Norton, Wilkins and Wilson) lauds self-help in its manifesto, *Black Initiative and Governmental Responsibility*, and calls on black "religious institutions, civic and social organizations, media, entertainers, educators, athletes, public officials, and other community leaders" to "emphasize . . . values." It was a master stroke of Reagan's second-term spin doctors to sugarcoat the offensive on the black poor with claptrap about special black middle-class responsibility for "their" poor and the challenge of self-help. The black leadership elite fell right into line and quickly institutionalized a cooing patter of noblesse oblige.

From that hegemonic class standpoint there is little room and less desire to criticize Farrakhan's contemptuous, authoritarian diagnosis and remedy. As he instructed *The Spotlight*:

We must be allowed the freedom first to teach our people and put them in a state of readiness to receive justice. . . . Blacks in America have to be concentrated upon, to lift us up in a way that we will become self-respecting so that the communities of the world will not mind accepting us as an equal member among the community of family of nations. . . . But when we [the Nation of Islam] get finished with these people, we produce dignified intelligent people. The American system can't produce that. We can.

In sum, Louis Farrakhan has become prominent in the public eye because he appeals symbolically both to black frustration and alienation in this retrograde era and to white racism, disingenuousness and naïveté. He also responds to the status anxiety, paternalistic class prejudice and ideological conservatism embedded within black petit-bourgeois race militancy. His antiwhite or anti-Semitic views are neither the most important issue surrounding Farrakhan nor the greatest reason for concern about his prospects for growing influence.

After all, he will never be able to impose his beliefs—no matter how obnoxious or heinous—on any group of white Americans. More significant, and more insidious, is the fact that racial units are his essential categories for defining and comprehending political life. That fact obviously establishes him on common conceptual ground with all manner of racists. (*The Spotlight* was happily curious about whether he and David Duke actually would disagree on anything in a debate rumored to be in the works.)

His racial essentialism has an appeal for many blacks in a purely demagogic way. It also gives him an outlook that seems disarmingly sensible to whites—at least those who can overlook his fiery pro-black sentiments and devil theories—because it fits into the hoary "What do your people want?" framework for discussing black Americans. That essentialist outlook also underlies his self-help rhetoric, which appeals to both whites and middle-class blacks. Whites like it because it implies that blacks should pull themselves up by their bootstraps and not make demands on government. Middle-class blacks like it because it legitimizes a "special role" for the black petite bourgeoisie over the benighted remainder of the race. In both views, "self-help" with respect to ordinary black Americans replaces a standard expectation of democratic citizenship—a direct, unmediated relation to the institutions and processes of public authority. Self-help ideology is a form of privatization and therefore implies cession of the principle that government is responsible for improving the lives of the citizenry and advancing egalitarian interests; it also rests on a premise that black Americans cannot effectively make demands on the state directly as citizens but must go through intermediaries constituted as guardians of collective racial self-interest. Ironically, "self-help" requires dissolution of the autonomous civic self of Afro-Americans.

The link between self-help rhetoric and racial custodianship is as old as Booker T. Washington, the model of organic racial leadership Farrakhan articulates. The idea that black racial interests can be embodied in a single individual has always been attractively economical for white elites. Giving Washington a railroad car for his own use to avoid Jim Crow



was a lot cheaper for white elites and less disruptive than socioeconomic democratization and preservation of citizenship rights. Jesse Jackson updated the claim to organic racial leadership and brokerage by enlisting mass media technology to legitimize it, and Farrakhan is following in Jackson's steps. Because of his organization and ideology, however, Farrakhan more than his predecessors throws into relief the dangerous, fascistic presumptions inscribed at the foundation of that model. That—underscored by the brownshirt character of the Fruit of Islam and the history of the old Nation during Farrakhan's ascent—is what makes him uniquely troubling. But demonizing him misses the point; it is the idea of organic representation of the racial collectivity that makes him possible.

It is that idea, whether expressed flamboyantly by Farrakhan or in the more conventional petit-bourgeois synecdoche that folds all black interests into a narrow class agenda, that most needs to be repudiated. Its polluting and demobilizing effects on Afro-American political life have never been more visible, thanks to promotion by the mass media's special combination of racist cynicism and gullibility. Cheap hustlers and charlatans, corrupt and irresponsible public officials and perpetrators of any sort of fraud can manipulate the generic defensiveness decreed by a politics of organic racial representation to support their scams or sidestep their guilt—all too often for offenses against black constituents. A straight line connects Washington's Tuskegee Machine, which sought to control access to philanthropic support for racial agendas, to Jackson's insinuation that "respect" for him is respect for all black Americans to Farrakhan's death threat against Milton Coleman to the pathetic specter of the rogues' gallery of Farrakhan, Illinois Representative Gus Savage, the Rev. Al Sharpton, the Rev. George Stallings and Tawana Brawley sharing the stage with Marion Barry at a rally to defend the corrupt Mayor's honor. That image captures the depth of crisis of political vision that racial organicism has wrought. □

EDITORIALS.

(Continued From Page 77)

lemma is clear. From its standpoint, it was all very well for domestic critics and allies in Europe and Japan to recommend that the Army just sit in the desert for six or more months. But who was going to pay as costs mounted?

Dismissing the possibility that the alliance would ever "hold together" for so long, the Administration decided to go for broke, to avoid actually going broke (or, more precisely, back to Congress). As *The Boston Globe* observed in an early January story on the upcoming budget, "Administration economists admit their projections assume a quick, clean finish to the Persian Gulf crisis, probably by March, and concede that if anything else happens the country's economic troubles will deepen."

What does the sovereign fact that buying time costs real money say about the fate of the peace initiatives now being frantically floated as the clock runs out? Nothing very optimistic. There is certainly nothing magical about the Janu-

ary 15 deadline. No financial constraint is so tight that it cannot be stretched for at least a few weeks, or even months, simply by rolling the additional expenditures into the deficit.

But if the United States is to avoid hostilities for an extended period, someone else is going to have to pick up the tab. And here a ray of hope recently flashed. During Dan Quayle's recent visit to the Middle East, *The New York Times* reported, the Vice President would be asking the Saudis and Kuwaitis for more money "because of the likelihood that American troops will remain in the gulf longer than initially anticipated."

On the other hand, oil prices are falling. In addition, the Saudis, the Kuwaitis and other gulf producers almost certainly want the U.S. troops out as quickly as possible, so they have little incentive to take on open-ended commitments for additional costs. (This judgment assumes that they, like the Administration, are counting on a "splendid little war.") In all probability, neither will Japan or the Common Market countries; instead, they will talk peace as long as possible, until they have to ante up. At that moment, they will probably duck back under the U.S. umbrella ("preserving the alliance") and wring their hands.

Can the Iraqis avoid disaster, perhaps by withdrawing partially or even totally? It is here that the analysis of Desert Shield in terms of costs is so telling—and ominous. From the American standpoint, the Iraqi Army, and perhaps Saddam and his nuclear projects, simply must be disabled. American forces have certainly not come all that way and spent all that money to leave the Iraqi dictator with the capability of walking right back over the border if they leave.

For this reason it is easy to see why earlier press reports described the most commonly discussed compromise proposal, a last-minute evacuation of most of Kuwait, as the Administration's "nightmare" scenario. Frustrating this possibility, which President Bush and prominent investment bankers have rejected in public, is almost certainly one of the reasons the Administration sought to shift forward the deadline for negotiations. For internal reasons, Saddam probably cannot afford a complete withdrawal, though he may be driven to try one; but if the real problem is the Army, this probably would not be enough either.

A peace settlement, in addition, would certainly bring Iraq and Kuwait back into the oil market, if only to let Iraq pay its debts to the Common Market and other creditors. But as the president of OPEC noted late last year, that would inevitably place immense downward pressure on prices and, although the Saudis could perhaps compensate partially by reducing production, their earnings would surely fall, adding to pressure for early withdrawal of U.S. troops.

The prognosis is grim. As the clock and the taxi meter click away in the Persian Gulf, let us hope that someone in the White House remembers that the heaviest costs of this venture will never appear on the budget.

Thomas Ferguson is professor of political science and senior associate at the McCormack Institute of Public Policy of the University of Massachusetts, Boston.

BOOKS & THE ARTS.

A Murder and Its Meaning

ELIAS VLANTON

THE POLK CONSPIRACY: Murder and Cover-up in the Case of CBS News Correspondent George Polk. *By Kati Marton. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. 369 pp. \$22.95.*

By the middle of 1947, American intervention in the Greek civil war between Communist-led guerrillas and the American-backed rightist regime had made Greece a coveted dateline for ambitious journalists. In July, George Polk, a young, irreverent and respected foreign reporter, moved his base of operations to Athens. Unwilling just to rewrite Greek government handouts, the CBS correspondent began voraciously gathering information about the people and politics of Greece. Over time his dispatches—always well reasoned and well researched—began questioning the honesty and competency of the Greek government, and of the American aid program propping it up.

On May 16, 1948, a few days before he was to return to the United States, a boatman pulled Polk's body out of the Bay of Salonika; his hands and feet were bound and he had been shot once in the back of the head. Within hours Greek authorities announced to the press that Polk had been killed by Communist guerrillas while on his way to meet their leader, General Markos—an assessment foreign-policy officials and the press largely accepted, even defended, throughout the case.

Efforts by members of the New York Newspaper Guild to send an independent team of journalists to Greece to investigate their colleague's death were quickly pre-empted by a committee of prestigious media representatives, headed by Washington columnist Walter Lippmann. The Lippmann Committee refused to back an independent inquiry, electing instead to work with the State Department in monitoring the Greek government's investigation. Lippmann appointed General William (Wild Bill) Donovan, the wartime head of the Office of Strategic Services, as the committee's counsel.

Elias Vlantou is a Washington-based writer who has been studying the Polk case for more than ten years.

When, a month after Polk's death, Greek officials had made no progress toward identifying his killers, Donovan dispatched a young Greek-American intelligence operative, Lieut. Col. James Kellis, to investigate the circumstances surrounding the murder. In the course of his inquiry, Kellis discovered that Polk had received information that Greek Foreign Minister Constantine Tsaldaris had deposited \$25,000 in a New York bank, money Polk may have suspected came out of U.S. aid funds. Shortly before his death the CBS correspondent had confronted Tsaldaris and threatened to destroy him and his government. In late July, as Kellis gathered indications that the rightists, not the Communists, were responsible for Polk's murder, the State Department had him recalled from Greece.

It wasn't Lippmann alone who failed George Polk; it was American journalism.

A few days later Donovan dramatically stepped up the pressure on Greek authorities to make an arrest. By August 14 the police had picked up journalist Gregory Staktopoulos; over the next six weeks the security police systematically tortured Staktopoulos until he agreed to "confess" to his role in helping the Communists to set up Polk. At a show trial the following April, Staktopoulos announced that the crime had been committed by two high-ranking Greek Communists acting on orders from the Kremlin. Staktopoulos was sentenced to life imprisonment as an accomplice. With a few notable exceptions, among them I.F. Stone, as well as Constantine Poulos writing in this magazine (May 28, 1949), the American press and government praised the verdict. The case was closed and largely forgotten for the next four decades.

Now Kati Marton has written a thrilling account of Polk's murder and of the cover-up by the American press and

foreign-policy establishment. Her story is fast-paced, compellingly written and entirely engaging, and many will finish it convinced that American journalism has finally gotten its man. Marton rightly condemns American government officials for having been more concerned with protecting their investment in the Greek government than in finding Polk's killers. She also properly raps Walter Lippmann for his gullibility in having accepted, virtually without question, information supplied by American officials and General Donovan. But by singling out Donovan and Lippmann as the chief villains in the press cover-up of the murder, Marton misses a larger point.

It wasn't Walter Lippmann alone who failed George Polk and Gregory Staktopoulos; it was American journalism. Although a central figure in the case, Lippmann was hardly the only journalist to accept blindly that the Communists killed Polk, while ignoring evidence that suggested right-wing involvement. He has to share that responsibility with most of his fellows, including Edward R. Murrow and other top journalists at CBS, the major dailies such as *The New York Times* and *New York Herald Tribune*, and other American reporters then covering Greece. The only dissenters were a handful of members of the New York Newspaper Guild.

This was not a gigantic conspiracy, but journalism-as-usual. It was reporters writing about countries whose language, customs and politics they were unfamiliar with and accepting the word of official sources—American and Greek—without doing the necessary legwork to confirm the information. Worse, there was a failure to apply basic standards of logic and fairness, whether to a murder confession riddled with inconsistencies or to a trial that mocked the notions of justice and the rule of law.

Unfortunately, Kati Marton, too, practices journalism-as-usual. Marton suggests that Foreign Minister Tsaldaris is ordered the assassination of Polk to prevent the reporter from carrying out his threat to bring down Tsaldaris and his government. She names Michael Kourteissis as the man who planned and carried out the murder. Kourteissis, she says, was part of a secret paramilitary organization within the port authority of Piraeus (OLP), to which Tsaldaris had close ties. Marton bases her claim on a series

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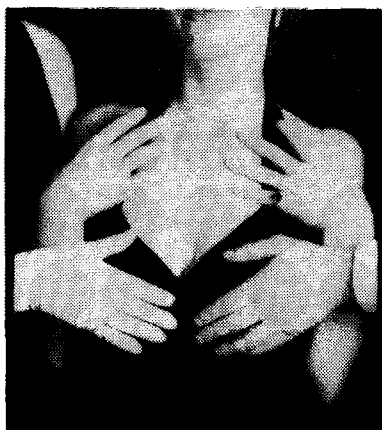
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of letters written to Colonel Kellis by one of the Greek informants he used during his investigation into Polk's death.

Marton did not get these documents from Kellis, now deceased, but from sources she does not disclose, "for I have assured them anonymity." Her grant of anonymity to her sources raises several relevant questions: Who needs anonymity in providing forty-two-year-old documents? Did the documents come from the C.I.A., where Kellis served in the early 1950s? If so, why were they given to Marton? Did she receive all the reports in Kellis's possession, or were they leaked selectively to lead the author's inquiries down a particular path?

Also, if the documents sent to Colonel Kellis were so convincing, why did Kellis himself evidently dismiss them? In a 1977 deposition Kellis testified he did not know who killed Polk, and he went on to suggest that a British information officer was involved. (That testimony is mentioned in *The Polk Conspiracy*, but Marton doesn't mention that it contradicts the thesis of the book.)

Had Marton independently confirmed the story told by Kellis's informant, and/or produced Michael Kourtessis, she would have made a valuable contribution to efforts to clear up the mystery surrounding Polk's death. But the evidence she has "uncovered" appears to be little more than forty-year-old hearsay—the kind of raw intelligence that informers routinely supplied to Kellis and other American officials, information that was often disproved, contradicted or replaced by new information a few days later—and hearsay is a far cry from hard evidence. Not only does Marton fail to prove that Kourtessis was a right-wing thug working for the OLP, she does not even prove that anyone named Michael Kourtessis ever existed.

In her analysis of the crime, Marton willingly sacrifices accuracy for drama. For example, *The Polk Conspiracy* claims that Kourtessis flew to Salonika between May 4 and May 6, 1948, to plan the murder, yet Polk himself only decided to fly there on May 7. How is this possible? Saturday night, May 8, Marton says, Polk dined in a private home with a group of right-wing conspirators posing as Communists. Sometime during the meal they put a soporific into Polk's drink; after the meal, Marton says, they said good night to Polk, who returned to his hotel, the Astoria. But why let him leave alive? How could the killers be sure Polk would

return to his hotel? Why not murder him during dinner, in the relative seclusion of a private home in Salonika, rather than risk killing him near the Astoria, which sits on one of Salonika's busiest intersections?

After following Polk up to his room, they stuffed the dazed journalist into a laundry basket, which the murderers wheeled out of the hotel and into an alley. The killers supposedly then shot Polk, dragged his body across a deserted Nikis Street to the edge of the quay and heaved him into the Bay of Salonika. No one familiar with Salonika or Greek habits will find this scenario convincing. Getting Polk's body from the Astoria Hotel to the bay required dragging it three long blocks in an area filled with outdoor cafes, restaurants and movie theaters. Why would the murderers have chanced such a display around midnight (Polk's watch stopped at 12:20, a fact Marton fails to mention), when the streets would have been full of Greeks taking a stroll after their typically late Saturday night dinner? Nor does Marton try to explain how a body dropped over the edge of the quay wound up miles out in the bay; given the action of the waves the body, if it had moved at all, would have been washed closer to the shore, not farther away from it.

In addition to her failure to reconstruct accurately the story of Polk's murder, Marton inflates as revelations her discoveries of facts others made long ago. She writes, for example, that a C.I.A. document on Polk "was declassified in 1988 by the C.I.A. as a result of a Freedom of Information suit by this author." In fact, the document had been released a decade earlier at the request of other journalists. Nor, as Marton implies, was she the first to bring to light the Polk-Tsaldaris fight, news of which appeared in left-wing American newspapers two months after Polk's death. And by 1949 the story of the Tsaldaris illegal bank deposit was known to the dissenting journalists based in the New York Newspaper Guild.

The *Polk Conspiracy* does not chronicle the efforts of John Donovan, a colleague of Polk's, who strove, largely without recognition, to uncover the truth about Polk's death from 1948 until his debilitating stroke in the 1980s. He traveled to Athens to talk with Gregory Staktopoulos after he was released from prison in 1960 (apparently the only American journalist to do so), and he doggedly pressed Kellis and others connected to

the case for possible leads. Donovan unsuccessfully tried to interest every broadcast network, including CBS, and countless newspapers to cover new developments in the case, and he submitted his own articles about the case to magazines and newspapers nationwide. Ironically, many of the same publications that have heaped praise on *The Polk Conspiracy*, among them *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, did not publish John Donovan's investigations ten and twenty years ago.

Nor does Marton's bibliography even list *The Salonika Bay Murder* (Princeton, 1989), by Edmund Keeley. Keeley's work, while not as intriguing or compellingly written as Marton's, remains a more reliable source about the murder, investigation and cover-up. Although Keeley fails to assign adequate blame to American officials for their role in the

cover-up, his book is thoroughly footnoted and factually correct, whereas Marton's is very poorly referenced and replete with errors. For example, throughout the course of her book Marton manages to get almost every detail of Staktopoulos's life wrong, including what he did during the war, how he was arrested, when he was transferred from jail to prison, when he was freed, when his brother died, and that his sister went insane.

To its credit, *The Polk Conspiracy* has again drawn attention to how American journalists forty years ago sacrificed their integrity to solidify domestic support for the cold war. The uncritical praise *The Polk Conspiracy* has received, however, shows how American journalists today accept a terrific story and stylish prose in lieu of meticulous research and critical analysis. Either way, they are still not getting it right. □

Elementary, My Dear Watson

BRINA CAPLAN

THE TABOO SCARF AND OTHER TALES. By George Weinberg. St. Martin's Press. 324 pp. \$19.95.

LOVE'S EXECUTIONER AND OTHER TALES OF PSYCHOTHERAPY. By Irvin D. Yalom. HarperPerennial. 270 pp. Paper \$9.95.

HEARING VOICES: Reflections of a Psychology Intern. By Scott Haas. Dutton. 196 pp. \$18.95.

Who would care about the mysteries Sherlock Holmes solved were it not for Holmes himself—the long fingers, the emotional restraint, the impatience, the odd assortment of talents? We share with Dr. Watson a sure sense that this fellow can understand what threatens his clients and baffles us, his readers.

"You see," Holmes tells Watson, challenging him to recall the number of hall steps in 221b Baker Street, "but you do not observe." Holmes observes: From a few motes and threads, he knows the unexpected visitor to his consulting room is a pipe smoker who favors latakia, has recently married and has hurriedly returned from the Continent. Because we are more like Watson, failing to observe

the stairs as we daily climb them, we are delighted as Holmes demonstrates that order underpins the scatter of everyday life, even when everyday life has been mysteriously or violently rearranged.

What we expect from the case, we also expect from the case study. When therapists make stories of their patients' troubled lives, they choose to lead us step by step up a stairway of pain and effort. We count on them to demonstrate along the way an unusual ability to observe what we would otherwise misunderstand or fail to see. And, of course, we want them to charm us as well.

Freud himself had the Holmesian knack. His case study of an obsessed reserve army officer, "The Rat Man," is plotted like a thriller—but one in which all the action is intellectual. As though in pursuit down hallways and over roofs, the analyst chases through associations and dreams, looking for the multiple meanings that "rat" has for this suffering patient, which collectively keep him in a state of paralysis. As Freud closes in, the meanings tend like spies to slip holds and change identities, showing up somewhere else disguised as honorable citizens. Freud's pursuit is excited but methodical, arriving finally at a deeply hidden pool of feeling within the Rat Man. All ideational corridors and associative passageways converge at this point, in an upwelling of forbidden infantile rage. Not, finally, in what the Rat Man thinks but in what he feels—or

Brina Caplan, a psychologist, lives in Boston.

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rather in what he did feel when he was an angry child, so small, so overwhelmed, so filled with hate.

George Weinberg, Irvin D. Yalom and Scott Haas are not tale tellers on the order of Dr. Freud or even Dr. Watson. And as central characters they lack Holmes's eccentric surety or Freud's excited sense that he is disclosing heretofore unrealized psychological principles. These are hard-at-work therapists laboring within a hierarchical, semiregulated industry. What they offer instead of dash is a valuable realism, a look at the difficulty and the complexity of therapeutic conversations. Their books encourage us to think about how, practically and in contemporary circumstances, one person can be of help in resolving the psychological suffering of another.

*Life will inevitably
offer us less than we
feel able to accept, de-
mand more than we
feel able to manage.*

Weinberg's patients include a gay waiter, an English professor with a specialty in Johnsonian studies and a facial twitch to match, and an inhibited anthropology student—the central figure of the title story—who cannot kiss her boyfriend on the mouth and nearly faints when a scarf is placed around her neck. The best of these clinical tales concern people living estranged, fearful lives, intersecting only tangentially with the world: Lisa, of "The Beacon," for example. Her central relationships are with cats, plants and inanimate objects, which she sees as like herself, vulnerable to misuse and capable of complex yearnings and disappointments.

Lisa is no mere eccentric; she has a gift. She is preternaturally observant (Weinberg in fact compares her to Holmes) and at the same time utterly naïve about the effect of telling others what she has seen. "So your boyfriend is very jealous, huh?" she replies to a co-worker who has left her male companion on the street to suddenly greet Lisa in a restaurant. How did Lisa know? "Well, you never talk to me," she explains to the astonished woman. "You don't even *like* me. You think I'm a nut! So why would you rush in like

that? Don't worry, I won't say anything. I didn't even know you had a boyfriend."

Lisa lacks a sense of efficacy, so she is surprised to learn she can disconcert others. Does she hurt *his* feelings? she asks her therapist. "Well, you laugh at me sometimes," he responds. "Like . . . the time I dropped my Rolodex when I went to pick up the phone. Or the time I was all dressed up in that dark suit because I was going somewhere formal, and you said I looked uncomfortable." The therapy consists of such moments, in which respect transfers from this somewhat rueful, admiring therapist to his bitterly self-critical patient. Weinberg also has a gift, one intrinsic to the therapy, to admire her strengths and to accept imperfection—not only Lisa's but his own.

However, Weinberg also shows us vividly that unanalyzed acceptance can be problematic for a therapist. In the almost farcical "King of the Beasts," he tells how, as a young intern, he manipulated a commitment hearing to gain release from a state hospital for a patient whose deadpan humor delighted him. Eddie was hospitalized after biting a state trooper, having growled and warned the cop that he was a lion. Now apologetic, he claims he was drunk. After the successful hearing, Weinberg gives Eddie a lift back to New York City. On the way, they are pulled over for speeding, and Eddie begins to growl ominously. "I looked over at him to see if he was smiling. His mouth was agape, incredibly wide. Then he flexed his jaws, opening and closing his mouth, as if getting ready—In terror, I warned him, 'Eddie, you better not . . . Lions only eat when they're hungry.'" Gone is Weinberg's certainty that this is a case of a too-easily-uninhibited joker. All along, Eddie has been more complicated than either the sanity hearing or his chief defender acknowledged.

When Weinberg's reminiscences are less than successful, it is because he maintains a smooth story line at the expense of his characters' complexity and grittiness, as though the lesson of the ride with Eddie had been forgotten. For example, he recounts lending Lisa money she needed for veterinary treatment for "Miss Prim," her cat. Weinberg brushes by the incident: "It has never crossed my mind," he says, "that my offer of money would have any countertherapeutic element. How despicable are the precisionists in psychology who care more about the operation than the patient! Lisa could only gain by my pitching in." Sure-

ly narrative imprecision is no way to answer those "despicable precisionists." Would Weinberg *never* hesitate to pay for a patient's pet that needed treatment? Miss Prim—why so called?—certainly had a special meaning within Lisa's world: What was it? Did Weinberg think his aiding Miss Prim would have any kind of effect on Lisa's view of him? What outcome did he hope for? Unfortunately, therapist Weinberg knows much more than narrator Weinberg is saying. At moments like this, the former could have helped the latter by providing a lot more dense, experiential, Holmesian detail.

The narrator of *Love's Executioner* is testier than Weinberg, more teacherly and more confessional. Irvin Yalom's book, recently reissued in paperback, sold its way onto the best-seller lists, creating controversy as it went. First off, highly unusual among tales from therapy, Yalom's cases do not all go well. The title story refers to Yalom's role with Thelma, a depressed 70-year-old woman who is unable to close the books on a brief affair with a former therapist. Yalom intends for Thelma to face the emptiness and despair that maintain fantasies of reconciliation with a lover gone eight years ago. She doesn't. She quits therapy instead. Saul, of "Three Unopened Letters," believes his exhausting efforts to gain an older scientist's regard have had exactly the opposite effect and have humiliated him before his hero. Depressed and anorexic, he reopens a onetime successful treatment with Yalom, only to withdraw further into depression. Does therapy cure him? No. Saul recovers upon learning that his hero has died—before he could possibly have known anything about his shame-provoking behavior.

Second, the book overflows with Yalom's ideas about treatment, Yalom's ideas about life. Yalom is an existential psychiatrist, who as a boy was beaten up from time to time in his otherwise all-black Washington, D.C., neighborhood. He is quite tough about how tough life is. Although all of us cherish illusions of specialness and exemption, he explains, we are all vulnerable. Life will inevitably offer us less than we feel able to accept or demand more of us than we feel able to manage.

Loneliness, ineptitude in relationships, desires blocked by fears or by competing desires, aging, death—these problems patients bring into psychotherapy are universal. "Patienthood," says Dr. Yalom, "is ubiquitous." Since patient and ther-

apist share the same existential problems, treatment depends not only on what therapists and patients say to each other but also on what therapists say to themselves.

Through these ten cases we get to hear a lot of what Dr. Yalom says to himself. We learn about his tendency to sexualize casual relationships, his dislike of women who are angry like his mom or fat like his mom—more, maybe, than we truly need to know. On the other hand, Yalom takes us step by step through the development of his working relationships with each patient. “It’s the relationship that heals,” he says again and again, repeating his “professional rosary.”

Take the case of Betty, title character of “The Fat Lady,” who on a good day weighs in under 250 pounds. Yalom agrees to be her therapist precisely because his revulsion is so strong. Several sessions along, he is dismayed to find himself utterly bored by her as well. Yalom admits his prejudices against fat women. They’re his problem. But Betty isn’t a mere victim of countertransference. She is essentially missing from every therapy hour, he concludes. Only her bulk and her chatter are present: “She was acting in bad faith with me—in our face-to-face talks she was never real, she was all pretense and false gaiety.”

He challenges her. She does not know what he’s talking about. “You tell me about a life that is full of despair,” he explains. “When you stay jolly like that, I lose sight of how much pain you’re having.” “Zee suspect takes zee fifth,” Betty responds. Yalom persists. And eventually Betty takes the risk of confessing how frightened she is to put her bantering manner aside. She’s never done that before. Perhaps there is nothing beneath it. Perhaps she is empty. Now Yalom likes her, now he is excited. Together they get the therapy under way.

A surprising number of Yalom’s cases start off similarly. Either he’s telling us how much he likes his new patient or he’s complaining: “I do not like to work with patients who are in love”; “Upon first meeting Elva . . . I could find little to love in her.” Sometimes this predictable recitation of his preferences seems tiresomely self-absorbed, but even then it serves a purpose, reminding us that the therapist’s personality is the only medium available through which treatment can be dispensed.

Therapy is not a Holmesian science, Yalom does well to remind us. It does not consist in an intellectual search for the

false trail a patient took at some specific moment in life. “A life never goes wrong because of a false trail; it goes wrong because the main trail is false”:

No, a therapist helps a patient not by sifting through the past but by being lovingly present with that person; by being trustworthy, interested; and by believing that their joint activity will ultimately be redemptive and healing.

Of course, *Love’s Executioner* shows Yalom bringing far more equipment to each session than these basic virtues. He hectors, manipulates, soothes, supports, reasons his patients into taking the next

needed step. He interprets their dreams, clarifies their statements, intervenes in their daily behaviors. If he seems to be saying that to do therapy all you need is love, that’s hardly what he shows.

In *Hearing Voices* Scott Haas describes the anxious uncertainty a new intern brings to the joint activity of therapy. Haas tells of his own internship year at the Massachusetts Mental Health Center, a Harvard-affiliated psychiatric hospital lightly disguised in his account as Commonwealth Mental. Like all large-scale state facilities, Comm. Mental can be

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parsed by caste. The teaching psychiatrists—sages, stars and poets among them—are in the role of warrior chiefs. They command, followed by psychologists, psychiatric residents, psychology interns, social workers, nursing staff and ward staff, all of whom in decreasing order of prestige treat those lowest in status, the patients. For the most part, Haas's year of training in clinical psychology takes place at the front lines, on an in-patient unit and at a day hospital within Comm. Mental, where nurses and mental health assistants do the day-to-day work.

Although Haas finds particular psychiatrists admirable, he takes a wry view of the sociopolitical pyramid into which he has been inserted: This edifice is architecturally comfortable for males, medics, Ivy Leaguers and those who are not suffering from mental illness. He is also adept at relating odd, tribal exchanges or assumptions that would have currency nowhere else, such as a supervisor's insistence that he search his unconscious for latent homosexual attraction to him because Haas showed up on one occasion late for their hour of consultation.

Four patients' lives intertwine with his during a year of overwork and anxious self-questioning. All four are seriously ill in-patients on a unit locked for safekeeping. These are the kind of patients trainees traditionally care for. Among the four is Fay, a bright young woman who shortly after completing high school became preoccupied with whispering voices and began to starve herself. Mr. Plummer is another, an elegant black man claiming to be "a world-famous specialist in pediatric medical surgery," who arrives disoriented and struggling, tied down on a stretcher, and is given antipsychotic medication against his will.

Despite a year of trying, Haas is unable to reach Fay, who waxes delusional

then wanes into chronic withdrawal. But over time both Haas and Mr. Plummer change. Medication, which Haas lures him into taking, decreases Mr. Plummer's agitation. Not without cost: He is now more aware of his distress, and is at risk for long-term side effects as well. However, conversations of a sort are possible. While Mr. Plummer speaks the vivid, disjointed language of schizophrenia, his therapist attempts to translate. "The poison," says Mr. Plummer, referring to the antipsychotic medication, "makes me feel like a mummy":

"Mummies are dead kings, right?"

"Dead pharaohs," he corrects me.

"I think what you're saying is that the medication makes you feel robbed of your powers."

"Yes," he says, smiling back at me.

He rarely smiles. It feels as if he has given me a gift.

Haas argues that treatment for patients as lost as Mr. Plummer must be particular. Medical thinking teaches in generalities—diagnoses and dosages—whereas patients can only be reached by a treatment immediately in tune with what they feel. Of course, that is the theme of Yalom's and Weinberg's books as well. Psychotherapy, they suggest, cannot resolve inner mysteries in the grand intellectual style of nineteenth-century detection. Treatment is more involving, more companionable, more intensely personal for both patient and therapist than a case model indicates. A therapist can well use Holmes's eye for detail and Freud's insight, but nothing will be effectively seen unless it is deeply felt as well as observed. □

East Side Story

ANNA SHAPIRO

MEMOIR OF A RUSSIAN PUNK. By Edward Limonov. Translated by Judson Rosengrant. Grove Weidenfeld. 312 pp. \$19.95.

Homer nods, but must he absolutely nod out? Edward Limonov is not Homer exactly, but his 1983 "fictional memoir" about Russian émigré life in New York, *It's Me, Eddie*, was poetry—an account that improbably gave eloquence and lyricism to living on welfare, screwing vagrants in deserted lots and unloved women in cushier surroundings, menial labor and, above all, unrequited love. The love was for a glamorous unfaithful wife, but equally for the countries and all their millions who had no use for Eddie and his poetry. The book was also very funny. Without humor, poetry or love, on the other hand, his new novel, *Memoir of a Russian Punk*, is about sordidness, violence, lust and an unconvincing pride. It is not without interest, however, some of a documentary kind, being set in Khar'kov, the "Detroit of Russia," detailing life among the proles in a fashion idealized not by exaltation of the working class but rather by rebellion as an end in itself.

Eddie-baby, as he is tiresomely called in almost every sentence, is 15, the very age of rebellion. Unlike Marlon Bran-

do's Wild One, he does not need to ask "What've you got?"—he's got plenty to rebel against, from the "trashies," the military police, who do indeed trash anyone unwary enough to cross their path, to his parents, as is usual at that age, who represent claustrophobic, upward-aspiring conformity. Eddie's father is in fact a trash—an officer in the secret police, conducting prisoners to execution or Siberia.

The documentary interest, of course, is in the exotic details and, conversely, in the striking but unexpected similarities between Eddie's world and what is very recognizable and familiar to us. Much of the book is taken up with initiating the reader into the values of Eddie's gang, which are indistinguishable from their counterparts' in working-class Britain or a tough neighborhood of Queens or New Haven. Eddie's great accomplishments are to have tailored his velveteen pants to illicit skinniness and gotten a Polish haircut; to have run a forgery scam and burgled a cafeteria; to have participated with his pals in beating up and robbing a trash, among other acts. His great secret shame is that he is still a virgin. The incidents in this novel of incidents revolve around Eddie's efforts to accumulate 125 rubles over two days in order to take his girlfriend, Svetka, to a fancy party. Great contempt is reserved for workers, and if there is any revolutionary agenda, it is for the abolition of work. The gang's chief occupation is in drinking enormous quantities of *biomitsin*, vodka, homebrew or whatever liquor they can conven-

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Anna Shapiro reviews books regularly for The New Yorker.

iently get their hands on. Some of the kids smoke pot and at least one shoots morphine.

It is no longer shocking to Westerners to hear of class distinctions in Russian society, although those are invariably presented as dividing the apparatchiks from everybody else. But everybody else is busy making distinctions too. Eddie's well-read mother shares the gang's disdain for workers, but in the mode of an intellectual in Levittown yearning for the Upper West Side. "The military and other educated people all moved to the center of town . . . and noisy working-class families—the proletariat, or as [Eddie's friend] contemptuously calls them, the 'hegemonic element'—quickly moved into the vacuum they had left. . . . Eddie-baby's mother started to pine." Eddie's father makes no use of his military connections, so the family remains stuck among the proles. As in this country, the distinctions within a range that might encompass, say, a plumber and a professor are less of income than of inclination.

It comes as no surprise that Western anything will have chic, but what's hilarious is that what's really cool in 1958 in Kharkov is Glenn Miller and Bobby Darin. Very exotic, too, in at least this reader's experience, is a several-paragraph examination of the hero's foreskin, complete with a discovery of the smegma it gathered, "rather like Roquefort cheese." This is by far the book's most vivid passage, and its afterimage weirdly lingers through what follows, including a rape or two (you keep imagining that damn cheese). Rape of girls and women is entirely taken for granted, even by the girls—who are depicted as liking it. The absolute rock-bottom class is simply female.

The climactic scenes, so to speak, are a gang rape accompanied by the murder of the women's male escort, and Eddie's rape of Svetka—after which she invites him to spend the night. The gang's rampage is reminiscent of nothing so much as the infamous Central Park "wilding," and no genius for description is required to make you feel nauseated, teary and angry, especially at Svetka's apostasy. What is disturbing beyond the events themselves is the tone in which they are presented. The voice of Limonov's earlier memoir is notable for a modesty that allows him to capture sensations others would choose to ignore, or fail to notice altogether. This boastful, underdescribed

installment on Eddie's earlier youth par-takes of its adolescent values, asking the reader to be impressed or admiring of his posturing along with him.

A Westerner is tempted to see the novel as a parable, less about mother than mother country, in which it is the homeland that gets raped; but I hope this observation is a symptom of reviewer over-achievement, such parallels being glib and making of literature a lesson plan. More likely it is an attempt to come to grips with a certain dreariness endemic to life. The British love to write about this dreariness, but when they do, it is with a crispness and clarity that make it almost bracing. When Eastern Europeans like Limonov do it, it is as if the leaden sky will never yield to sunshine. This does not seem to be a product of anything so temporary as political regimes; it looks constitutional. □

FILMS.

STUART KLAWANS

Privilege

Jon Jost

The Bonfire of the Vanities

What would it be like if reviews were to imitate the films they discuss? In most cases, not so good. For example, here's a write-up for *Kindergarten Cop*: "Schwarzenegger is a cop, and he's in kindergarten." To complete the exercise, you must now imagine reading that sentence over and over for ninety minutes.

What's easy (though painful) to conceive for *Kindergarten Cop* is delightful but virtually impossible for Yvonne Rainer's new film, *Privilege*. A truly imitative review might start out in neatly typeset lines like these; but then the printed column would miraculously open and out of it would pop another magazine, also called *The Nation*. The review would continue there—only it would have become a front-page article about a political activist named "Yvonne Rainer," and the lettering would keep changing size and color, and sometimes the reviewer would start reading aloud from over your shoulder.

Sound like fun? Some of us think so, and we'll be hanging out at New York's Film Forum, which is the latest place to show *Privilege*. (A national release will follow.) For those who are not yet

convinced, let me offer a further explanation—unavoidably linear in form—of what Rainer is being brilliant about this time.

The subject of *Privilege* by Yvonne Rainer is menopause—specifically, the way women respond when they're at last ignored by men, rather than being desired and feared and hated. Within *Privilege* is "Privilege"—a pseudodocumentary by a character called Yvonne Washington (Novella Nelson), on the subject of attaining equal rights for the deaf. Within "Privilege" is an interview between Yvonne Washington and a woman named Jenny (Alice Spivak), who has recently undergone menopause. Within the interview is a fiction, in which Jenny tells a story about her life as a young dancer on the Lower East Side some thirty years ago—a life that parallels the biography of Yvonne Rainer.

I hope you're thoroughly confused by now, because that's part of the plan. If *Privilege* keeps pulling rugs out from under your feet, it is because one's angle of vision changes in interesting ways during the course of a pratfall. Sexism and heterosexism, racism and capitalism—these wearisome, godawful facts of social life, which often look as solid and inert as rocks, take on light and motion when represented as one really experiences them, over a lifetime of being knocked down and getting up again. (That there's always a recovery after the fall—that the mode of *Privilege* is finally comic—may be seen in the overall arc of the action. The film starts with Rainer herself declaring that this will be her "last address to women. . . . You want to know why I'm retiring? Because the men did me in." But it ends with a vision of Utopia, conceived as the wrap party for the film you're watching.) Or, to put it another way: Rainer is interested in politics not as slogans but as daily life. She is interested in ideas not as objects of study but as actions of the mind and heart. She is interested in social roles not as fixed identities but as loyalties that can conflict and sometimes shift. She is interested in filmmaking not as a tool but as a toy, which is most useful when most surprising.

Surprise yourself. See *Privilege* at Film Forum (through January 24), or catch it wherever it shows up next.

One of Rainer's contemporaries, the prolific independent filmmaker Jon Jost, is enjoying a tour of his own—a retrospective, which runs at New York's Museum of Modern Art from January 18

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through February 18 and then travels to other cities. A few of the highlights:

Speaking Directly: Some American Notes (1973) was Jost's first feature-length film and still excites debate. Made on a shoestring budget—Jost tells you the exact cost during one sequence, and also shows you all the equipment used—the film is a two-hour attempt to discover links between the artist's quasi-Thoreauvian life in Montana and the war in Vietnam. (For the record: Jost, the son of a career Army officer, spent two years in jail for draft resistance.) Continually poised between self-questioning and self-justification, the film is bound to raise questions about bad faith—especially given Jost's choice of a words-of-one-syllable approach.

Like many artworks from that era—from Kurt Vonnegut's *Breakfast of Champions* to Sol LeWitt's sculptures—*Speaking Directly* tried to re-imagine everything from the ground up. An unkind critic could call it *faux naïf*; a more sympathetic viewer, like me, might say the film was so zealous to make the world new again that it was willing to risk looking banal, stupid, embarrassing. Certainly the most riveting moments are those in which Jost, having shown pictures of far-away people who affect his life (Nixon, Kissinger), interviews the people he actually knows. One by one, they reveal uneasiness, perplexity, doubt and anger with the democratic tyrant behind the camera. These scenes are about as close to the bone as a man can slice himself, and I can't help but admire Jost for having filmed them.

In recent years, Jost has moved away from essays to narratives, the best of which so far is probably *Rembrandt Laughing* (1988). Set in San Francisco and starring Jon A. English, a composer with whom Jost often collaborates, the film is a quiet, subtle story about onetime lovers, longtime friends, artistic aspirations and intimations of mortality. While watching the final scene, I found myself laughing aloud and then starting to weep—the sort of unhinged behavior I would hesitate to confess, except that *Rembrandt Laughing* is such a lovely film. I recommend it highly.

The retrospective also includes two premieres. *All the Vermeers in New York*—a romance about art and money in Manhattan—has its moments but ultimately evaporates off the screen. *Sure Fire* is another matter. This drama about families and friends at odds, up in the mountains of Utah, is dedicated to Jost's father—

which is as expressive an act of filial loathing as I can imagine. The central character, portrayed unforgettably by Tom Blair, is a study in oily self-righteousness, perpetually foisting his unwanted help on a world he despises. I'm not sure the film is entirely successful as drama—the climax is prepared from above, by authorial intervention—but as psychological portraiture, *Sure Fire* is astonishing. It is as if Jost has gone back to his doubts in *Speaking Directly*—his self-questioning about manhood, violence, the will to take advantage of people and make them thank you for it—only now he's found a way to make those ideas flesh.

As for *The Bonfire of the Vanities*: Iain Douglas-Hamilton has shown in his studies at Lake Manyara National Park that the East African elephant is a playful and affectionate creature, living in herds made up of matriarchal families. Interactions among adult males tend to be ceremonious; aggression rarely breaks out, even among herds that share a territory. So I regard it as an insult to one of the most attractive of species to describe Tom Wolfe's novel as elephantine. Lumbering, yes. Bloated, leatherhided, myopic, continually trumpeting its own importance as it tramples the landscape—but let those grotesqueries of body and behavior be totemized correctly, as Wolfen.

Who cares what Brian De Palma would do with the novel? I wanted to see what he might do to it—and during the first minutes of *The Bonfire of the Vanities*, I was not disappointed. Immediately, De Palma sets forth three propositions:

1. The drunken journalist Peter Fallow (Bruce Willis) is identified with Tom Wolfe—all that's missing is a white suit.

2. Fallow's self-serving scandal-sheet lies are identified with *The Bonfire of the Vanities*.

3. Everybody who admired the book is identified as a fool.

All right. I also took heart from the form of this opening assault, an endless tracking shot. Granted, there's an element of macho posturing to such displays, which have become the directorial equivalent of the 360-degree slamdunk, or worse. Imagine De Palma, Scorsese and Kenneth Branagh in the locker room, disputing whose is longest. (If we're interested only in size, then the answer is, Yvonne Rainer's. See *The Man Who Envied Women*.) But the bravura gesture, coupled with this framing story, sug-

gested that De Palma meant to turn Wolfe's novel inside out. That, in turn, suggested that the guts would spill out—which would not be a bad way to apply this director's talent for evisceration.

It never happened. De Palma improved on Wolfe in many ways—reducing vast tracts of verbiage to a few quick shots, putting the most virulent of the author's free-floating racism into the mouths of obvious buffoons—but in the end what he gave us, in all its empty, mechanical contrivance, was the story Wolfe wrote.

Put it down to a failure of nerve. *The Bonfire of the Vanities* wasn't bought and budgeted for those of us who loathed the novel but for the millions who loved it. To his credit, De Palma couldn't quite bring himself to serve that legion of cinematic lip-readers; but neither could he get away with ripping open the book's gaseous corpus. So you wind up with the now-notorious scene near the end, in which the judge (Morgan Freeman) tells everybody to recover a sense of decency. I suspect De Palma meant for his more wisened-up viewers to interpret the scene as a parody of uplifting movie lectures; the more literal-minded could take it at face value. The way it plays, though, nobody is going to like it, except for Morgan Freeman's mother. And that, I suppose, is a good thing. At last, a black woman will have a reason to enjoy *The Bonfire of the Vanities*.

Screening Schedule: Half a dozen recent works by international filmmakers will be on a national tour as Cutting Edge III, the latest installment of this indispensable program. So far, I've seen only one picture of the group, which is the whole point: These are films you wouldn't be able to find otherwise. Cutting Edge III starts its tour in New York at Film Forum, January 16, and then proceeds to Philadelphia; Cleveland; Cambridge, Massachusetts; Ithaca, New York; Minneapolis; St. Louis and some twenty other cities. Don't miss it.

The Castro Theatre in San Francisco will be showing a restored print of F.W. Murnau and Robert Flaherty's *Tabu* (1931) on January 28 and 29. In Berkeley, the Pacific Film Archive will screen two Ernst Lubitsch comedies on January 30; films by the contemporary Mexican directors Arturo Ripstein and Jaime Humberto Hermosillo during February; and for black history month, a series titled "Images of Minorities in Film."

The American Museum of the Moving Image in Astoria, Queens, will show a se-

ries called "The 1970s: New Black Cinema," February 9 through March 3. The films accompany an exhibition in the galleries, "From Harlem to Hollywood: American Race Movies, 1912-1948."

A belated welcome back to the Collective for Living Cinema, which is once again going full tilt at 41 White Street in New York. I couldn't possibly summarize what they're showing. Ask the box office, (212) 925-2111.

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THEATER.

MARGARET SPILLANE

Generations of the Dead in the Abyss of Coney Island Madness Telltale Hearts

You can write roaring tragedies full of native villains, immoral women, and cruelty of every kind, and you'll have a huge audience, all of which respect themselves for being able to stomach such home truths. "It's ugly but it's true and it needs to be said," says one. "I couldn't agree with you more," says another. "I've seen with my own eyes the things he has written about. I remember well the woman who made black puddings out of her lover's guts after she killed him."

—Patrick Kavanagh (1905-1967)

"We could be in Harlem!" the nice white suburban couple seated behind me at the Long Wharf Theatre's *Generations of the Dead in the Abyss of Coney Island Madness* enthused over and over. Because the author of this unremittingly horrifying and violent play is an African-American, such audience members choose to treat the work as an unedited cry from the street. But anyone who's ever had the misfortune of sitting in on a graduate school writing seminar could see that Michael Henry Brown's play has M.F.A. written all over it. *Coney* is loaded with theater world in-jokes: evocations of the Mama-on-the-couch of Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*, people getting dumped out of windows à la

Margaret Spillane, a painter and writer, lives in New Haven.

Ntozake Shange's *For Colored Girls...* (both of which have already been so brilliantly lampooned in George C. Wolfe's *The Colored Museum*). There's even a social transformation cribbed from *The Playboy of the Western World*, when a wimpy suitor becomes a revered titan by inadvertently killing somebody. And the characters' names are so grad-school arch: The decent, long-suffering figure of disrespected fatherhood is called Job. A troubled adolescent boy just blowin' in the wind is called Reed (who has some primordial problems with Mom, so of course he puts his eyes out like Oedipus). The three women have variations of the same name—Lena, Lenore, Marlene—and the message there is clear: Put a bag over their heads and they're all the same.

If any social-policy document ever put a similar bag over their heads, it was the infamous Moynihan Report. *Coney Island* rushes so enthusiastically to condemn the African-American mother for every suffering inflicted upon the black family that I wonder if Daniel Patrick Moynihan is not a closet dramatist. The play is chock full of those stock black characters Moynihan found scary: the impressionable young girl cruising for an out-of-wedlock pregnancy, the disconnected young boy whose only authority figure is the local dope dealer. Most terrifyingly recognizable of all is the Black Matriarch—that man-eater who refuses to conform to the missionary model of Daddy at the head of the table and thereby poisons both her community and the children's future. Even though Lenore, *Coney Island*'s horror mom, lives in squalor, cuts up men and corrupts her children, the play does far worse than simply point a finger. It seems it's a problem of, ah, "legacy." The girl can't help it.

Lenore's household is no quietly despairing photo opportunity for the One Hundred Neediest campaign. She can make a meal of a six-pack and a bottle of Dewar's without missing a single move in the next hustle that happens her way. She buys beer and marijuana with food stamps, responds to the slightest provocation by swinging a meat cleaver and instructs her teenage daughter, Lena, "Now you go and get knocked up like we planned . . . you go to welfare . . . they'll probably set you up."

Lenore gave up daughter Lena and Lena's twin brother, Reed, at birth; the twins were adopted by relatives on Long Island. After a safe suburban upbringing Lena's now a college student, preparing for a career in theater. Her brother's hav-

ing trouble with drugs, but it's the lyrical, lysergic, suburban kind of trouble. Without a word of explanation, the twins swiftly abandon their middle-class comforts and aspirations, move into their mother's horrible high-rise housing-project apartment (where Lenore is living with several younger children and Job, the husband she relentlessly abuses). Lenore reveals to Lena that catechism of chiseler's techniques normally heard when the Heritage Foundation gathers round the fireplace for story time. Deriding Lena's efforts to get a college education, Lenore considers these scam lessons as part of "my obligation to see you start life on the good foot." Lena and Reed slide instantly and irrevocably into Coney Island life, Lena aggressively defending the housing project and becoming her mother's scheming double, Reed drifting dementedly, navigated by whatever chemical he's ingested.

That two proto-buppies should so suddenly embark on a course of self-immolation is a particularly nasty piece of sociological determinism: You can take the child out of the slum, but you can't take the slum out of the child. Is the playwright contending that some siren song lures African-Americans, in spite of four centuries of stubborn resistance to genocidal incursions, back to some bed of rubble that history has made for them? *Coney Island* has escaped any critical drubbing for such rotten politics because it's so "real."

The looking-ugly-reality-in-the-face way of approaching social problems through art is neither new nor useful. It's as extreme in its monomania as "Up With People"—and about as accurate a representation of the world. It's not a question of whether things are really that bad; it's whether any situation is that contradiction-free. The playwright has been praised for having the courage to shock, but there's nothing brave about being one-dimensional, about evading the dense complexities of even the worst urban circumstances.

Coney Island's message would flush a lot of brave impoverished Americans down the toilet. Not long ago I sat in on a Head Start parents' meeting in which a young mother spoke undramatically about watching people queue up at a truck beneath her housing-project window while some civil servant-type handed out numbered tickets. She thought it was a welfare truck distributing surplus cheese; in fact, it was the neighborhood

crack dealers, who were nonchalant enough about their visibility to conduct their business as if it were a deli counter. Yet here was this woman speaking out in a room full of other mothers from the same housing project, which also contained their children's Head Start classroom, an island of stubborn consistency that has prevailed for a quarter-century in spite of the kinds of threats that truck represented. These unsentimental parents knew very well that white society considers them and their children disposable. These women must daily perform their unseen labors on behalf of a fairer world for their children while listening to a daily growing chorus of voices murmuring that poor people of color are exhausting their economy with their needs, diseases, addictions and unemployability. But these people aggressively resist the category into which they have been thrust. Given the cynicism and indifference that have helped defund even the most rudimentary antipoverty programs, the degree of healthy resistance and activism that continues at the grass-roots level is astonishing.

Not every dramatist shares Brown's misogyny and cynicism.

Another instance of de facto racism: There have been no complaints about one very big problem in this play—its lack of a historical frame. The costumes (miniskirts and Day-Glo), the music (Jimi Hendrix, O.C. Smith, the Beatles) and the drugs of choice (LSD, marijuana, cocaine) all hark back two decades, while the napalmed spiritual landscape of the city is unmistakably Reaganesque. But there's no crack, no AIDS, no drive-by shooting and no homelessness. It's as if when you're talking about "the ghetto," specifics of time, politics and current popular culture are irrelevant, because "ghetto" life is so Other; as long as the cast is black and violent, let the details be damned.

One detail, however, is very clear: Playwright Brown is content to blame black women for this terrible state of affairs, and to see everything vile as having a black woman's face—and genitals. Over and over, male characters exclaim that their Coney Island world is "a whore that sucks you in."

Not every dramatist tackling these social emergencies shares Brown's misogyny and cynicism. Lynn Nottage, a young African-American playwright from Brooklyn, still lives in the old neighborhood. In plays like *Rhinestones and Paste*—staged recently in New York and New Haven—Nottage writes about the truly despised: black junkies, transvestites, unhinged street preachers and hustlers. If Nottage is unflinching in her descriptions of degradation, she is as deft at uncovering those filaments of tenderness that still glow inside such battered lives, those burdensome dreams still cherished by those the world chooses to ignore.

So what did the Long Wharf have in mind when it assembled a superb cast of ensemble actors around so remarkable a director as L. Kenneth Richardson? What they got was a powerhouse presentation of an undercooked—and therefore toxic—piece of social commentary. And while it may seem very audacious of the Long Wharf to stage such a controversial looking play, let's bear in mind that a significant portion of the theater's subscribers come from Connecticut's affluent Fifth Congressional District, where a right-wing black millionaire, Gary Franks, just got elected to Congress by a substantial margin. And *Coney Island* does a fine job of summing up Franks's philosophy of who's to blame for the damage being done to urban blacks.

As I left the 45th Street Theater after seeing *Telltale Hearts*, I thought about my senior year in art school, when one professor took off-the-record exception to his colleagues' predictable standards of excellence applied to the selection of works for the annual student show. "They only hang the pictures that 'work,'" he complained. "They should include some of the stuff that doesn't quite succeed, because people can learn a lot by looking at good ideas that somehow don't quite make it." And so it goes with *Telltale Hearts*. It's a comedy about heterosexual urban black professionals looking for love, and has plenty wrong with it. But *Telltale Hearts* handily manages something that most American plays find an impossible feat: It demonstrates the particulars of class differentiation within a group generally portrayed in the media as homogeneous. The one thing that saves playwright Joe Barnes's eight characters from being television

buppies is that each bears the distinct markings of individual history. While these eight may drink at the same club, it's clear that geography, gender, class, education and even birth-rank in family sharply delineate what each feels entitled to pursue.

It's also a play that can't decide on its genre, sometimes looking like naturalism, sometimes cabaret. But the production's slow moments are redeemed by Jack Landron, who brings a Shakespearean clown's double-talking grace to the role of Kevin, a first-generation professional trying desperately not to screw up. □

MUSIC NOTE.

GENE SANTORO

Charles Mingus's *Epitaph*

Charles Mingus's musical ambitions and abilities were as prodigious and far-reaching as his other appetites. An avid student of European composers like Debussy and Bartok, he also saw himself as the heir of Jelly Roll Morton and Duke Ellington. One central concern of those two giants was the relationship between composition and improvisation, the dialectical motor that powers jazz. How to reconcile soloing with the more expansive structures made possible by a big band became a subject Mingus explored as well. He opened the territory for later investigators like Muhal Richard Abrams, John Carter, Henry Threadgill, David Murray and Wayne Horvitz.

Epitaph is one of Mingus's major statements on the matter. The ambitious piece—with a score for a thirty-piece orchestra 500 pages (and nearly 4,000 measures) long—was rediscovered only in 1985 by the composer's widow, Sue Graham Mingus, and musicologist Andrew Homzy. Homzy pasted the yellowing fragments together, in some cases bar number by bar number; then critic-composer-musicologist Gunther Schuller, a longtime friend and professional associate of Mingus, adapted the results.

In June 1989, nearly thirty years after it was written and a decade after its composer's death, *Epitaph* debuted to a sold-out Alice Tully Hall. (There was a botched attempt to play and record it at Town Hall in October 1962, but due to time constraints and poor planning the performance was a fiasco and the United

Artists album that resulted was mangled.) Several months later, the two-CD *Epitaph* (Columbia), a recording of the Lincoln Center set, was released, with a forty-four-page booklet of exhaustively detailed notes by Homzy and Schuller.

Conducted by Schuller, the orchestra boasts all-stars like trumpeters Randy Brecker and Wynton Marsalis, altoists Bobby Watson and John Handy, tenorman George Adams, trombonist Britt Woodman and pianists Sir Roland Hanna and John Hicks. They tear into *Epitaph*'s eighteen sections with an appropriately fierce vengeance—although had Mingus been at Lincoln Center, he might well have infuriated the participants (and goosed the proceedings) into an even feistier mode.

The music demands every bit of the players' considerable drive and talent. It's difficult, at times almost inchoate, partly because of *Epitaph*'s sheer magnitude and many shifts. But it's also rewarding: Its riotous gargantuan sweep scrambles gutbucket blues and sanctified church, Morton and Ellington and Monk, Stravinsky and Bartok and Tin Pan Alley.

In classic Mingus fashion, perspectives multiply as styles careen across *Epitaph*'s sprawl—from ominously mournful ballads to grungy up-tempo stomps to classically organized set pieces. Sometimes the ensemble work, which is usually taut, floats with the lush and gradually unfurling harmonies that mark Mingus's introspective side. At other times the band explodes into strutting and swelling, the edge-of-cacophony exuberance that's also quintessential Mingus. Solos, both scored and improvised, sometimes take center stage and sometimes just flicker at the ensemble's edges. Even a casual listener has to be staggered by the music's range and power.

Bravo, the cable TV channel, taped the two-hour-plus concert, and scheduled it to be shown in its entirety on January 18 and 27. Check your local listings for exact air times. □

EXCHANGE.

(Continued From Page 74)

customary obeisances to such hypocrisy and to his sentimentalism about "those who have tried hardest to alleviate [the black poor's] pain." The gasps of incredulity punctuating his review aren't about my being mired in racism; they're the protestations of a man being stripped of his own racial specialness and the

intricate structure of moral exemptions within which he and others have taken refuge from political reality. It is they who've let "the black poor" down with a politics that has become a moral and strategic disaster. *The Closest of Strangers* is a wake-up call. Jim Sleeper

BURNS REPLIES

New York City

My response to Bob Fitch: Your Highness, there is nothing in my review to suggest that I feel the "civil rights revolution" is beyond criticism. However, those who do criticize, Jim Sleeper included, are not beyond a critique of their critique. A forum or forums might be a good idea—as I indicated in my review, Sleeper probably has a lot to offer. Be forewarned though: If he starts talking about "Negroes" or does a 1990s version of an *Amos 'n' Andy* caricature of black speech with some made-up quotes, I, for one, will not suffer in silence.

George Scialabba's summary of that portion of Jim Sleeper's argument he chooses to summarize (and it is the major part) is balanced and fair. If he rereads my review I think he will find that I address all those issues—perhaps not with the "evidence and nuance" that he would prefer, but then, since he appears to be fair, I am sure he would acknowledge the difference between a book review and a book for these purposes.

It is not that I missed Sleeper's point. It is that I disagree with it, and by extension with Scialabba's excellent summary. To wit: Legal structures are *not* "behind the back" of the electorate. They are part and parcel of our democratic system, and Americans have always taken great interest in what their courts were doing (hardly "out of public view"). Scialabba might want to revisit Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* on this point. Further, the contests are not between "legal and other professional elites" so much as between those who discriminate and those who are discriminated against—"class" actions usually on behalf of the racial minorities, women and the poor. Also, it is simply bad history to assert that effectual and enduring racial victories can be won "only" by "interracial electoral majorities." Many enduring and effectual victories have been won in other areas, and electoral majorities are often unreliable guarantors of minority rights (see Tocqueville again on the tyranny of the majority). That is why we have a Constitution and a Bill of Rights—and why we all should be leery of subjecting them to a plebiscite.

As far as too great a reliance being placed upon "a rhetoric of grievance and victimization," who is to tell a victim how much it hurts, when to scream and in what way? Surely Scialabba might find some better explanations as to why we have not reached common ground than that of the discriminated-against crying out against their discrimination.

Try white racism, for example. Sleeper and Scialabba both slide right on by it with not much of a nod. My review did not doubt the

"centrality and significance" of Sleeper's argument about the "relationship between political strategy and political culture." My quarrel with him was the extent to which he makes these concerns central, while taking so little account of the virulence and the persistence of white racism as a form of social pathology.

We cannot come to true common ground as long as Sleeper, Scialabba and so much of white America are unprepared to make this a central issue and a political concern. Articulating it is at least as important a job for black and white leaders as the one Scialabba has assigned to them. In fact, and I hope he would agree, it is part of it.

As for Jim Sleeper, I did say he had a wealth of experience. I never placed him on the left, however, and would never do so with anyone of his racial views. My purpose in describing his analysis was not, as he would have it, to "anathematize" or isolate him but rather to let potential readers know exactly where he stands—which unfortunately does not isolate him but rather places him squarely in the middle of a host of "ancient enemies" who have long blamed black people for their own victimization and attacked liberal and left efforts at its alleviation.

On the "Negro" question, Sleeper really just doesn't get it. His excuse for using the term is that in a big book he used it only sixteen times. We should be grateful it was not seventeen? Once was one too many. As to limiting its use to its "historical context," Sleeper is uncharacteristically unclear as to what he means. We can all hope that he is not suggesting we go back to calling racial and ethnic groups what they were called at earlier points in history when discussing those periods.

Sleeper concedes, as he must, that although he attributes to Carey McWilliams the argument that slavery was just another variant of the economic exploitation experienced by countless whites, he wholly adopts that argument in his book and proceeds from it. He must, therefore, bear the weight of my criticism of that analysis. Similarly, by making a blanket charge that his positions have been "wrenched hideously out of context," Sleeper attempts to escape from direct engagement of the specifics of my critique. If I have mischaracterized his position on affirmative action; one person, one vote; full due-process rights for recipients of public housing or public education; the role of public defenders; or any other substantive issue, he should say so. On reread Sleeper comes off no better on those (and other) topics than he did the first time around.

As to references to me in the book, they were not mentioned because they were not worth mentioning. In the anecdote concerning CUNY Law School the *only* reference to me is as the designated recipient of recommendations from a student committee concerning a public interest lawyer award to be made at graduation exercises. Furthermore, even assuming the truth of Sleeper's account,

it is at least highly debatable if his anecdote is "unflattering" to CUNY Law School, since it concerns a discussion within the graduating class as to whether C. Vernon Mason should receive the award from the class. The proposition was eventually voted down. From all he has said, I am sure Sleeper does not quarrel with the result and associates himself with the views of the majority of students involved. The second, and unrelated, reference is to an account of a racial incident I witnessed in which a white gang attacked, as Sleeper recounts it, "some black men"—actually it was a lone black youth, but in a single review, working within *The Nation's* word limitations, I hardly thought it necessary to inform the readers of this reference or to make this (or other) relatively minor correction.

I will comment neither on Sleeper's integrity nor his intellect, but I cannot ignore his hyperbole. He knows full well that there was nothing in my review, or that I have otherwise said, to suggest that I believe Jim Sleeper is the only one in New York to engage in racial insults and name calling. The practice is one I have condemned all my adult life. My point simply was that he does engage in racial insults and name calling. At least some of the gasps he detected in my review were because I had thought and hoped he was better than that. My biggest gasps arising from his response to my review come from the astounding statements he makes concerning "legal assaults on an ever more elastically defined racism" and the futility in America of a politics based on "dramatizing racial grievances." As to the first, Sleeper should know that the problem today in the legal realm is that the courts are giving an ever more restrictive definition of racial discrimination and increasing the difficulty of proving it. The definitional problem here is not that the civil rights advocates' definition is too broad; it is that the conservative courts are making it too narrow.

As to the politics of dramatization of racial grievances not standing a "ghost of a chance in America," did Sleeper sleep through the civil rights movement? It was precisely through this means that an entire society was changed. If it now refuses to change even more, this may be more a commentary on the society than on its critics. Whether America will respond or not, good and decent people of whatever hue must continue to cry out. Racism just won't go away. It cannot be papered over. It must be exposed and eradicated.

As should be clear from my review, I do not disagree with the community-organizing, coalition-building tactics that Sleeper advocates. Where we sharply differ, however, is over his negative view of the continuing importance and efficacy of publicly confronting racism and the full use of available legal tools to exercise it from the body politic.

In the dawn I see both the darkness and the light, but "darkness" apparently has a different meaning for me than it does for Jim Sleeper.

Haywood Burns

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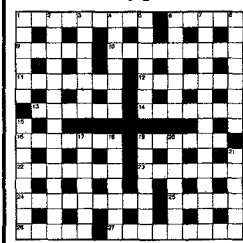
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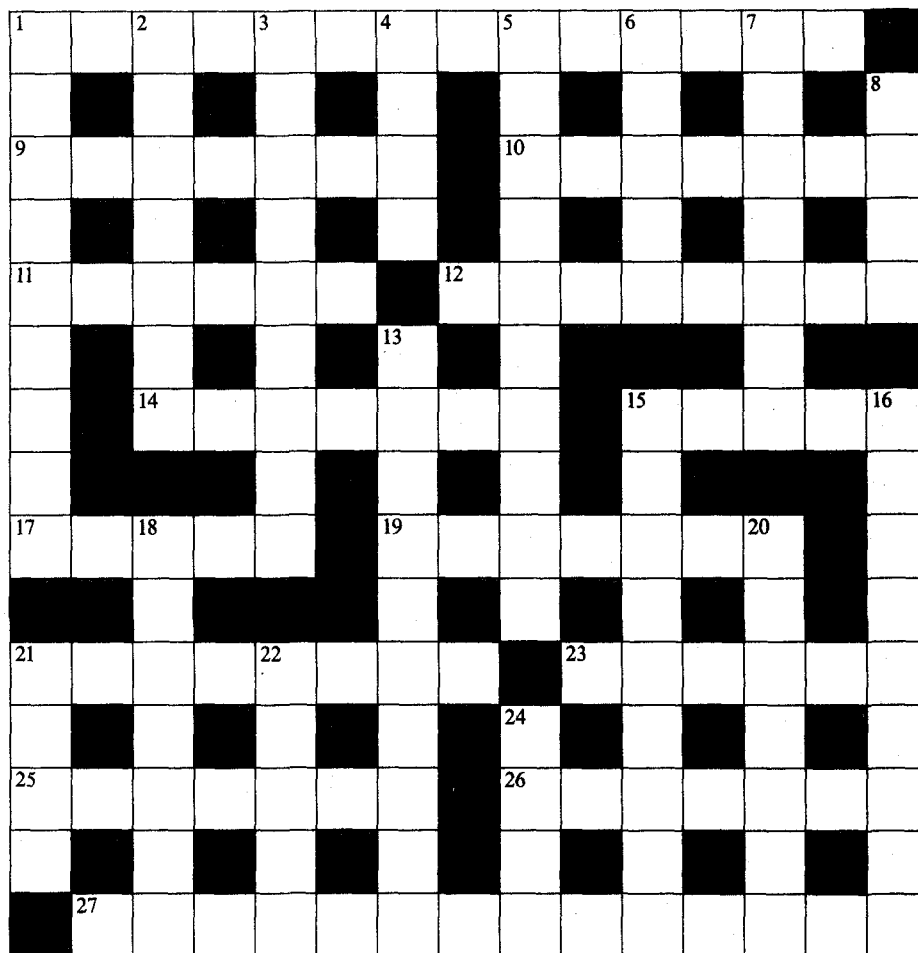
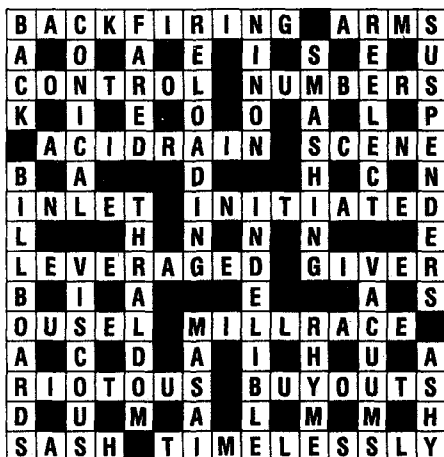
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SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 2320



ACROSS

- 1 Therefore behave! (3,11)
- 9 A measure returns in a kind of weight that might be associated with the air of Kansas City. (7)
- 10, 11, 17 and 19 Sampling characters from *Andy Hardy* to Sci-Fi to martial arts to *National Geographic* specials! How could the movie moguls miss! (7,6,5,7)
- 12 In the end, I objectively take her (subjectively) and get caught, in a sense. (8)
- 14 TT—part of the old-fashioned costume! (7)
- 15 If you bet, lay off! (You'll have a pretty sort of row with the English!) (5)
- 17 and 19 See 10
- 21 Very commonly cried—cried derisively about HO₂ (not H₂O.) (8)
- 23 See 24 down
- 25 In grandpa's day they associated this with 23 as a parting shot. (7)
- 26 What he got is mainly a showing of selfishness, in a sense. (7)
- 27 Alice's father? (7,7)

- 5 When things go off, these might be responsible. (I hears you is missing in detours around the treaty group.) (10)
- 6 Uncle Sam's daughter, typically. (5)
- 7 Ale is brewed above the outbuilding, but kept under control. (7)
- 8 What some patents seem to do, being a quiet conclusion? (4)
- 13 Somewhat like one of Noel's 20? (10)
- 15 Ilex and ebony, for example—where the stars glitter. (9)
- 16 The old tax collector might be Max's 6, sort of. (9)
- 18 The lion might be wild, but could be found 8-9000 BC. (7)
- 20 Contented ones don't have to be told to keep them up. (7)
- 21 Break up a top kind of statue? (4)
- 22 We have to get a little each day. (5)
- 24 and 23 across Does it call for labial examination? (Nothing extra for the 16 would seem to be in order.) (4,2,4)

SEE LAST WEEK'S SOLUTION AT LEFT

DOWN

- 1 One of the RUR types, wearing a carpet for the car? (9)
- 2 What Dan Patch did? Went bad at the end of Lent! (7)
- 3 A marigold, for instance, looks like a sort of lily around nude arrangement. (9)
- 4 Stone animal found around New York. (4)

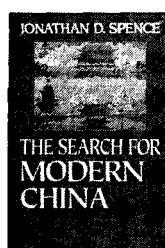
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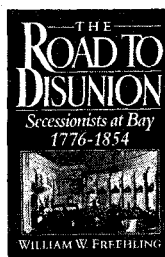
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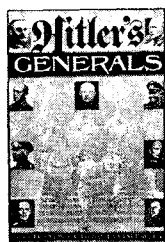
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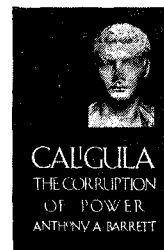
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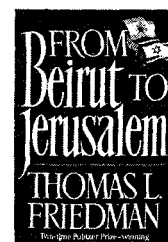
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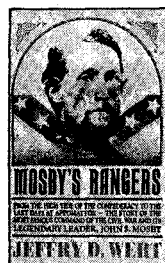
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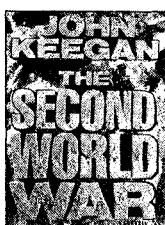
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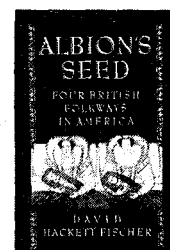
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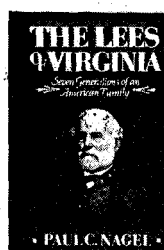
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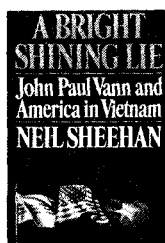
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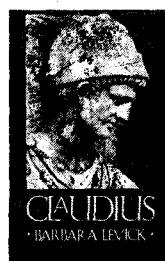
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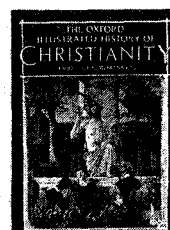
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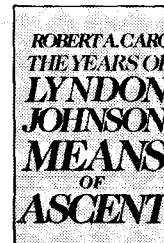
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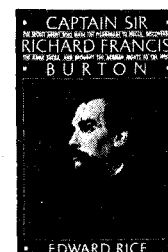
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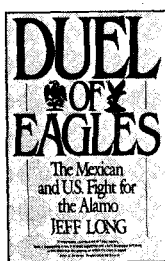
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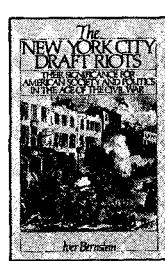
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